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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Metro fare hike put on hold, says BMRCL

BMRCL says matter will be taken up by board

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

The proposed annual fare hike for the City's Namma Metro has been put on hold, the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) said in a statement on Sunday.

The hike of Rs 1 to Rs 5 on 10 zones was scheduled to come into effect from 9 February.

The BMRCL said the fare revision would not be implemented until further orders, indicating that a final decision is still pending. The corporation added that the matter would be taken up by its board before any final decision is made.

However, the Congress and Opposition traded blame on who controlled the Fare Fixation Committee (FFC).

Earlier, BJP MP Tejasvi Surya said that Union Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs Manohar Lal Khattar had instructed officials to temporarily put the proposed metro fare hike on hold.

Commuters wait for a Namma Metro train—*MOHAMMED ASAD*

Reiterating its service commitment, BMRCL said it continues to prioritise commuters' interests.

"BMRCL remains committed to providing safe, reliable, and affordable metro services to the citizens of Bengaluru," it said.

Under the new structure, Namma Metro fares were set to rise by Rs 1 to Rs 5 across 10 zones, with charges adjusted according to travel distances throughout the network.

The BMRCL had said that the revision is being implemented as per the FFC constituted under the Metro Railways (Operation & Maintenance) Act, 2002.

While the Congress alleged that the FCC was controlled by the Centre, the BJP said that the ruling party had asked for the Committee to be constituted.

Notably, the proposed 5 per cent hike comes after last year's massive 71 per increase.

Commuters and politicians alike noted that this would become a burden for commuters.

On Saturday, Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy charged that the State government was unwilling to maintain a good working relationship with the Centre for implementing central schemes and policies.

He said that it was attempting to pass the blame to the Centre, which was "simply not true". —*PTI*

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The two people ejected to safety before the plane crashed in Babaleshwar Taluk of Vijayapura, on Sunday —*SALAR*

Pvt aircraft crashes in State, no casualties

VIJAYAPURA, 8 FEB

Two people, including the pilot, had a narrow escape when a private mini aircraft crashed into an open field in the district on Sunday afternoon, police sources said.

The two-seater aircraft belonging to Redbird Aviation in Kalaburagi crashed at Mangaluru village in Babaleshwar Taluk of Vijayapura district, they said.

Both the occupants ejected before it crashed, sources said, adding the aircraft broke into three pieces.

Those who survived the accident were identified as Captain Kunal Malhotra, who is an Assistant Flight Instructor (AFI) at Redbird Aviation, and trainee pilot Goutham Sankar PR.

The duo sustained injuries and was rushed to a hospital. It is said that the training aircraft was flying from Kalaburagi to Belagavi.

A civil aviation ministry spokesperson said, "Redbird Flying Training Academy Limited's Cessna 172 Aircraft, VT-EUC (MSN-17265717), made a forced landing in a field near Bagalkot, 100km east of Belgavi Airport." —*PTI*

Two die in Koppal after drinking game

KOPPAL, 8 FEB

Two youths have died after falling critically ill in Koppal district, allegedly after consuming spirit during a drinking party. The incident took place in Kukanalli village, where four friends reportedly attended a party four days ago and later consumed spirit. Soon after, all four developed severe health complications. They were admitted to different hospitals for treatment. One youth, who was being treated at the Karnataka Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS), died during treatment, while another, admitted to a private hospital, also succumbed despite medical efforts. The remaining two youths are continuing to receive medical care, and their condition is said to be under close observation. Authorities have launched an investigation into the incident, including the source of the spirit consumed. —***Salar News***

Gandhi Smarka Nidhi slams Mahatma ad war

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

The Karnataka Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi (KGSN) has criticised both the ruling Congress and the opposition BJP for misusing Mahatma Gandhi's image in newspaper advertisements. It objected to a Congress advertisement showing Gandhi admonishing a figure for scrapping MGNREGA and a BJP advertisement depicting Gandhi raising his stick at Congress leaders. Condemning the portrayals as derogatory, KGSN said they affronted Gandhi's core ideals and damaged the sanctity of his legacy. It termed the issue a matter of serious national concern. —***PTI***

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ICC official heads to Lahore over India-Pak boycott

KARACHI, 8 FEB

Imran Khwaja, Deputy Chair of the International Cricket Council, has left for Lahore to meet Pakistan Cricket Board officials as efforts intensify to resolve the standoff over Pakistan's proposed boycott of the T20 World Cup match against India. Khwaja, nominated by the ICC board as mediator, is expected to hold talks with PCB chief Mohsin Naqvi and Bangladesh Cricket Board president Aminul Islam. The discussions aim to persuade Pakistan to reconsider its decision not to play the high-profile match scheduled in Colombo on 15 February. —***PTI***

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Unnao rape: Sengar moves Supreme Court seeking bail in death of survivor's father

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

The Supreme Court is likely to hear on Monday expelled BJP leader Kuldeep Singh Sengar's plea seeking bail in the custodial death case of the Unnao rape survivor's father.

On 19 January, the Delhi High Court had refused to suspend Sengar's 10-year jail term in the case on the grounds of delay in trial, saying it was partly caused by the multiple applications he had filed in the matter.

On 13 March, 2020, Sengar was sentenced to 10-year rigorous imprisonment by a trial court, along with a fine of Rs 10 lakh, in the case.

—*PTI*

The trial court had said "no leniency" could be shown for killing a family's "sole bread earner".

The trial court, which did not hold the accused guilty of murder in the father's case, awarded him the maximum sentence for the offence of culpable homicide not amounting to murder after holding that there was no intention to kill.

Sengar's appeals in the main rape case against the December 2019 judgement convicting him and sentencing him to imprisonment for the remainder of his life, as well as the father's case, are pending in the high court. —*PTI*

CONG FUMES OVER BJP VIDEO OF HIMANTA 'SHOOTING MINORITIES'

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

The Congress party on Sunday hit out at the BJP over a video posted on the X handle of the ruling party's Assam unit, claiming it showed the "targeted point-blank murder of minorities" and sought judicial action in the matter.

The now-deleted video showed Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma purportedly taking aim with a rifle and firing a shot at two people – one wearing a skull cap and the other with a beard, with "point-blank shot" as the caption.

The Assam BJP unit posted a video showing CM Himanta Biswa Sarma pointing a gun and shooting people, assumed to be Muslim —*SCREENGRAB*

"This is nothing but a call to genocide - a dream this fascist regime has harboured for decades," Congress general secretary in charge of organisation Venugopal wrote on X.

"There is no hope that Narendra Modi will condemn or act against this, but the judiciary must act, and there shouldn't be any leniency shown in this case," Venugopal said.

"This is who the BJP really is: Mass murderers. This venom, hatred and violence is on you, Mr Modi. Are the courts and other institutions sleeping?" Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinate posted on X.

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka Chaturvedi wrote on X that after outrage, the BJP Assam unit went on to delete the post, but it was there long enough for many people to download and spread it further. —*PTI*

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Khazanah Nasional Berhad Managing Director Amirul Feisal Wan Zahir, in Malaysia —*PTI*

India-Malaysia reaffirm defence, trade cooperation

KUALA LUMPUR, 8 FEB

India and Malaysia on Sunday pledged to deepen cooperation across priority sectors such as trade and investment, defence, energy, advanced manufacturing and semiconductors, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi reaffirmed commitment to Indo-Pacific peace and stability.

Both Modi and Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim appreciated efforts to promote the usage of local currencies — the Indian Rupee and Malaysian Ringgit — for trade settlement.

"We will pave the way for economic transformation through strategic trust," Modi said, describing the India-Malaysia relationship as "special".

"We are maritime neighbours. For centuries, our peoples have had deep and cordial ties," he said in his media statement.

"Along with AI and digital technologies, we will advance partnerships in semiconductors, health, and food security," he said, noting that the discussions at the CEO Forum opened new opportunities for trade and investment.

Modi said he and Ibrahim also had a "meaningful discussion" on regional and global issues.

"In this environment of global instability, the growing friendship between India and Malaysia is of vital importance to both countries." —*PTI*

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Modi should step down: CM on US trade deal

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has harmed India's sovereignty and weakened the farmers' livelihood by signing the trade deal with the US and demanded he step down.

"A Prime Minister who exposes the nation to pressure, weakens farmers' livelihoods, and damages India's dignity cannot continue in office. For the harm caused to India's sovereignty and self-respect, 'compromised' Modi must take responsibility and immediately resign," Siddaramaiah said in a post on X.

The interim trade deal announced would become "a death warrant for farmers," he said.

Siddaramaiah said that the deal was "economic coercion", followed by pressure tactics on India's import of Russian oil. He noted that Russian oil accounts for 40 per cent of the oil that India imports, meaning that by agreeing to curb its purchases, prices of petrol will rise.

"Modi has weakened India's independence and lowered the country's standing globbaly." —*PTI*

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If Bangladesh Hindus fight, Hindus everywhere will help: RSS Chief

MUMBAI, 8 FEB

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat issued a warning on Sunday about the condition of Hindus in Bangladesh, saying that if they decide to stand up for their rights, Hindus from across the world would help them.

Bhagwat was speaking at the two-day Vyakhyanmala titled '100 Years of Sangh Journey: New Horizons' in Mumbai.

Addressing the second day of the RSS lecture series titled '100 Years of Sangh Journey: New Horizons' in Mumbai, Bhagwat pointed out that Hindus number 1.25 crore in Bangladesh.

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat addresses a '100 Years of Sangh Journey' lecture series for the organisations centenary year, in Mumbai on Sunday —*PTI*

He also urged people to "detect and report illegal infiltrators" to the police and not to give them employment. Bhagwat also highlighted that SIR has already exposed "foreigners" in the country. "Their language gives them away. We should report them to the authorities". — *Agencies*

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BECOME SELF RELIANT

'India to end fruit, vegetable, and flower imports'

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan announced on Sunday that India aims to become self-reliant in the production of fruits, vegetables, and flowers, with imports in these sectors set to cease. Speaking at a review meeting with officials at the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)-Indian Institute of Horticultural Research (IIHR), Chouhan said the focus was on identifying high-demand crops and ensuring their profitable domestic production.

He stated, "We will not import fruits, flowers, and vegetables. We have to become self-reliant in this field."

Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, centre, with State Agriculture Minister N Chaluvaraya Swamy, second left, during the International Trade Fair 2026, at Palace Grounds, Bengaluru on Sunday —*PTI*

Referring to crops previously dependent on imports, he said, "We were importing avocado; now we have started producing it."

Chouhan stressed the need to extend this approach to other emerging crops, such as dragon fruits, and has directed officials to identify fruits that must be produced domestically and encourage farmers to grow them. Profitability remains the key driver, as he said, "They will take up production only when it is profitable."

On vegetables, he noted there was no requirement for imports, but noted that shelf life was an issue. —*PTI*

2 pedestrians killed in accident in Chintamani

CHINTAMANI, 8 FEB

Two elderly people died after a car collided with their motorcycle near Katamachnahalli on the outskirts of Chintamani on Sunday. The deceased are Nagaraja, 65, from Kallahalli village, and Venkata Reddy, 58, from Munthakadirenahalli. The incident occurred around 11.00am as they were heading towards Chinnasandra village on the Bengaluru-Madanapalli highway. Nagaraja was attempting a turn when a high-speed car coming from the City rammed into their motorcycle, causing severe injuries. Both were rushed to Chintamani General Hospital and later referred to NIMHANS Bengaluru. While being transported in an ambulance, both succumbed to their injuries near Hoskote, and their bodies were returned to Chintamani for autopsy. The car fled the scene after the collision. *—SALAR NEWS*

'Run for Mysuru, Unite for cleanliness' marathon held

MYSURU, 8 FEB

The "Run for Mysuru, Unite for Cleanliness" marathon, organised by the Mysuru City Corporation to promote public participation in hygiene and environmental initiatives, drew an overwhelming response on Sunday. The run commenced at the Kote Anjaneya Swamy Temple near the North Gate of the Mysuru Palace. Renowned sculptor Arun Yogiraj emerged as a major highlight by completing the 10-km run. As per the directive of the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, the nationwide Swachh Marathon was organised under the theme "Public Participation in Cleanliness." The event aimed to create awareness about keeping Mysuru trash-free as part of Swachh Survekshan 2025–26. Officials and staff from Central and State government departments also took part. The marathon was organised in 3 km, 5 km and 10 km categories, with participants enjoying drum beats while running along the route. *—Salar News*

Slugfest over who controls Metro fare hike

BJP say State asked for the fare committee to raise fares, Cong says Centre heads panel

MYSURU, 8 FEB

BJP MP Tejasvi Surya meets people about the Metro fare hike -MOHAMMED ASAD

Bengaluru South Tejasvi Surya claimed on Sunday that the Karnataka government repeatedly asked the Fare Fixation Committee to increase metro fares. He said had the proposal gone through, it would have been a significant burden to commuters.

"The State government has repeatedly blamed the Centre for the repeated fare hikes on the Bengaluru metro. Today, I wore a t-shirt that clearly states the argument the state government and its authorities made before the fare fixation committee... Karnataka government officials demanded an upward revision of fares due to the State government's financial position," the BJP leader told press. "They also requested that we initiate an automatic annual fare revision process... Because the State is in a weak financial position today, it cannot continue providing the shadow cash support it had been providing for years. They requested that the Fare Fixation Committee not only revise the price upward but also implement an annual automatic fare-fixation formula"

He noted that a close to 105 per cent increase was proposed last year.

Similarly, Bengaluru Central MP PC Mohan alleged that financial mismanagement forced the State into this position.

"The 5 per cent Metro fare hike may be on hold, but the reality remains: a 71 per cent hike was imposed after financial delays and fund mismanagement. Bengaluru's commuters cannot be a cash machine for a bankrupt Congress Government. We must push for fair, permanent relief, not temporary fixes," he wrote on X.

He claimed that the Congress government withheld support for the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL), which is why the hikes were suggested.

However, the Congress hit back.

IT/BT Minister Priyank Kharge quipped on X that the BJP would praise Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Centre if the Namma Metro increased by even 1 metre, but would blame the State Congress if the fare increase by even Rs 1. He said this showed the contradiction in their claims that the FFC was controlled by the State.

He said that the FFC was headed by a member by the Centre.

"If there is a proposal for fare hike, the central government has the power to decide on it," he stated. "The State government had requested to form a FFC in 2024, but in the current situation, the BJP leaders are using past letters to mislead the people and blame the state government."

Earlier, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said that the State government had not been consulted on the fare hike.

"No file on the fare hike has come to me. I will discuss it with BMRCL officials on Monday," he had stated.

However, the BMRCL has announced that the proposed hike of between Rs 1 to Rs 5 has been put on hold amid the backlash. *—Salar News*

GTD is no longer with JD(S), says HDK

MYSURU, 8 FEB

The feud between Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy and senior JD(S) leader GT Devegowda took a turn for the worse with the former saying that the Chamundeshwari MLA is no longer part of the party.

GT Devegowda will be replaced in the 2028 assembly polls, Kumaraswamy told press in Mysuru. Kumaraswamy also accused GT Devegowda of moving closer to and even praising Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

He said that GT Devegowda had been absent from party meetings. "GTD is with a 'great leader' now," the JD(S) second-in-command quipped.

Minister Kumaraswamy accused Siddaramaiah of being more focused on blaming the Centre or the JD(S) than working for development.

"The Congress government is a jaundiced eyed about me after I was elevated as the Union Steel and Heavy Industries Minister," Kumaraswamy quipped.

GT Devegowda had earlier been stripped of several of his positions over anti-party activities. He has flirted with the idea of switching parties, but never committed.

INTERNAL PROBLEMS?

Kumaraswamy said that although HD Devegowda was willing to pass on the baton to someone outside the party, no one was willing to take up the top post and lead the JD(S) in the State.

He noted that a lot of this was likely due to former Hassan MP Prajawal's sexual abuse scandal.

Kumaraswamy lashed out at Siddaramaiah for targeting HD Devegowda, Prajwal's grandfather. The attacks brought pain to the former prime minister at "his age".

MANDYA AND RETURN TO STATE POLITICS

Addressing criticism that he had not brought any development to Mandya, his parliamentary constituency, Union Minister Kumaraswamy said that Union government has initiated measures to set up the Automotive Research Association of India research centre at the cost of Rs 500 crore.

The Central government has sought the Karnataka's help to acquire about 100 acres of land to set up the centre. He also said the State Forest Department was not allowing iron ore to be extracted from Kudremukh, in Chikmagaluru. "Although Karnataka needs my presence at this moment, I will be returning to State politics for the next Assembly elections," Minister HD Kumaraswamy said. *—Salar News*

A DRY SUMMER

Ulsoor Lake lies drained for development works, awaiting the next rains to revive its ecosystem that supports several avian fauna and animals. The large-scale development works worth Rs 100 crore, include removal of silt, construction of a pedestrian bridge, and restoration and expansion of the walkways MOHAMMED ASAD

Drunk women hit cab driver, abuse crowd in City

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

Two intoxicated women in the City created chaos on Saturday night.

According to details, the women were returning after visiting friends when they allegedly hit a cab from behind while riding a bike.

The cab driver, identified as Ahmed, questioned them about the accident, leading to an argument. During the confrontation, the women allegedly abused him and hit him with a helmet. Locals who intervened to calm the situation were also reportedly assaulted. It is further reported that the women used a chain wrapped around their hands to attack the cab driver during the altercation.

Videos of the incident show the women abusing the crowd and making obscene gestures at onlookers. One of the women is seen kicking some men as they try to apprehend her.

Even after being taken into police custody, she continued to make obscene gestures and shout abuses at the crowd. Local residents reported the incident to police.

A case has been registered against the two women, identified as Lisa and Matthew. They are in custody, and further probe is on. *—Agencies*

US-India trade deal is a death warrant for farmers: Siddaramaiah

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah slammed the interim trade agreement between India and the US, saying is will "become a death warrant for 140 crore Indians, and especially for the country's 72 crore farmers".

In a statement on X on Sunday, Siddaramaiah alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has "bowed his head to US President Donald Trump" by welcoming the trade agreement.

Siddaramaiah said the framework is deeply unfair because the US will continue to impose tariffs of around 18 per cent on Indian goods, while India is being pushed to reduce tariffs on American goods to zero and remove other barriers.

He added that there are claims that India will import American goods worth USD 500 billion. US leaders have openly said this framework will benefit American farmers and rural America.

"At the same time, Indian agriculture stands to lose heavily. Indian farmers will be forced to compete with cheap, subsidised American farm products, threatening the livelihoods of 72 crore farmers and farm labourers. This is not free trade. It is economic coercion," he stated.

"The fact that the American farming community is unanimously welcoming and celebrating this agreement is an indication that it will become a death warrant for India's farmers," he added.

India accepted these terms because Modi reduced India to a position of weakness, where protecting himself mattered more than protecting the country, Siddaramaiah charged.

Cases involving billionaire industrialist and Modi's "close friend Gautam Adani" are ongoing in US courts, he said. He also alleged that the names of the Modi and a Union Minister have emerged in the Jeffrey Epstein files. *—Salar News*

POCSO victim attempts suicide in help centre

A minor girl, a survivor in a POCSO case, allegedly attempted suicide at a government-run Balmandir (children's home) in Karwar on Saturday, officials said. The girl, a native of Haliyal taluk, was rescued last August under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and admitted to the children's home under the District Child Protection Unit. She was studying in Class 8 at a government high school in Karwar but had not attended classes for the past two weeks due to mental distress. According to sources, at around 1pm, she allegedly went to an upstairs room when no staff were present and attempted to hang herself. The staff noticed the incident in time, rescued her and shifted her to the Karwar Institute of Medical Sciences (KRIMS) Hospital, where she is undergoing treatment in the ICU. The incident has raised concerns over lapses in supervision and mental-health support. The girl had earlier been treated at NIMHANS and was reportedly under psychological stress. The home houses around 20 girls with staff strength of 10. Authorities have ordered a detailed report, and an internal inquiry is under way. **Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support**

FLAGS IT AS DEROGATORY

Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi flays Gandhi ad politics

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

The Karnataka Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi (KGSN) has taken strong exception to the ruling Congress government and the opposition BJP engaging in a spat through advertisement in leading dailies here using cartoon of Gandhi.

In its full-page advertisement on the front page of the leading vernacular and English dailies on 3 February, the Congress-led Karnataka government showed Gandhi admonishing 'Sangh-Appa' wearing a white shirt and a Khaki pant for scrapping Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

The advertisement takes a potshot at the Centre for replacing the MGNREGA with Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajivika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G).

In retaliation, the BJP put out a full-page advertisement on 7 February showing Gandhi lifting his stick to hit Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Congress MP Rahul Gandhi and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge calling them all 'Nungappa' (The one who squanders everything).

"To you, the Nungappa who are using Mahatma as your property," Gandhi is shown as telling the trio who pose requesting him not to hit them.

Condemning the alleged misuse of Mahatma Gandhi's image in newspaper advertisements, KGSN called it an affront to the Father of the Nation's core ideals and a matter of serious national concern.

"The way in which he (Mahatma Gandhi) has been portrayed, it brings shame to the entire nation and is contrary to his core ideals such as non-violence, Satyagraha, and Sarvodaya," a KGSN statement said.

KGSN President Wooday P Krishna and honorary secretary MC Narendra said portrayal of Gandhiji in the advertisements was derogatory and likely to damage the sanctity of his legacy.

They also urged the media to act responsibly and uphold its national duty. *—PTI*

Vaishnaw lying about train corridors: Congress MLC

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

Congress MLC Ramesh Babu accused Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw of lying about the benefits that the bullet train corridors would bring to Karnataka and demanded his apology for the misleading statements

Vaishnaw held a press conference in Bengaluru on Saturday, and said that the proposed bullet train corridors for Bengaluru-Chennai and Bengaluru-Hyderabad would connect the three largest economies of South India.

He had also said that said Karnataka has received a record Rs 7,748 crore in this year's railway budget -- nine times the allocation during the Congress-led UPA government.

However, Babu said that these claims were nothing but "political misinformation". He noted that of the proposed bullet train corridors, only two pass through Karnataka. The others do not help the State at all.

"Claiming benefits to Karnataka is false propaganda and an insult to the intelligence of Kannadigas," Babu said in a statement on Sunday.

He claimed that the Railway Budget has been neglecting Karnataka for years through meagre allocation for new railway lines. He noted that there were long pending connectivity projects in North Karnataka and coastal regions.

He said that there the NDA government has not implemented several projects sanctioned by the previous-UPA government.

Notably, Union Minister Minister of State in Ministry of Railways V Somanna, who represents Karnataka, was absent from Vaishnaw's presser. Babu questioned how Vaishnaw could make the claims without inviting Somanna, claiming it exposed the BJP's groupism.

He urged Vaishnaw to make concrete announcements for the State and said "Karnataka would not be treaded like a second-class State". "Why does Karnataka receive empty statements while northern states receive projects worth thousands of crores?" he added. *—Salar News*

—ANI

BJP forced to pick Marathi mayor: Sanjay Raut

MUMBAI, 8 FEB

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Sunday claimed the BJP was forced to field a Marathi candidate for Mumbai mayor due to overwhelming support from Marathi voters for his party and the MNS in the BMC elections. Speaking to reporters, Raut said the Sena (UBT)–MNS alliance's "Marathi identity" plank compelled the BJP to choose a Marathi face. He also took a swipe at the RSS after actor Salman Khan was seen interacting with its chief Mohan Bhagwat, questioning the message it conveyed amid growing communal polarisation. Raut criticised BJP mayoral nominee Ritu Tawde, claiming she was originally from Congress. Tawde is set to become Mumbai's mayor unopposed after Sena decided not to field a challenger. —*PTI*

No compromise on terrorism: PM in Malaysia

India to establish an Indian Consulate General in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, 8 FEB

India and Malaysia on Sunday vowed to expand their ties in various high-priority sectors, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterating India's position on combating terrorism.

Following his wide-ranging talks with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, said: "Our message on terrorism is clear; no double standards, no compromise."

The two sides inked a total of 11 agreements and documents to expand cooperation in a range of key areas, including a framework pact for deeper engagement in the semiconductor sector.

Modi also announced India's decision to establish an Indian Consulate General in Malaysia.

In his remarks, Ibrahim noted India's economic growth and said his country would benefit immensely if it could secure more ways and opportunities to collaborate with New Delhi.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim during the exchange of MoUs, in Malaysia, on Sunday —*PTI*

"It (India's economic growth) is one spectacular rise in the international eco and trade scene," he said, describing the decision to use local currencies for bilateral trade as "remarkable".

In the talks, Malaysia extended its support for India's permanent membership in a reformed UN Security Council.

Elaborating on engagement in the security domain, Modi said cooperation in counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing, and maritime security will be strengthened.

Modi touched upon India's position on Indo-Pacific and its steadfast views on the 10-nation grouping ASEAN's centrality in the region.

Additionally, Modi met Indian National Army (Azad Hind Fauj) veteran Jeyaraj Raja Rao in Kuala Lumpur and conveyed the gratitude of all Indians for INA's extraordinary courage, legacy, and sacrifice.

Meanwhile, said that Ibrahim is a "big fan" of MGR, just like "several of us in India", as a song from the Tamil actor's movie 'Naalai Namathe' was presented during a lunch hosted for the Indian leader.

Maruthur Gopalan Ramachandran, popularly known as MGR, was a popular Indian actor, director and producer who founded Tamil Nadu's AIADMK party and went on to become Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister. —*PTI*

'DEAL IS WORK IN PROGRESS'

India-US trade deal safeguards farmers: Goyal

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Commerce Minister **Piyush Goyal** stated Sunday that the US trade agreement includes robust safeguards to protect Indian farmers and domestic industries from import surges.

Echoing this, BJP National President Nitin Nabin praised the "diplomatic and patient" negotiations, asserting that the deal successfully secures the interests of both workers and the agricultural sector.'

Speaking at Ramleela Maidan, Nabin said the Modi government had "diplomatically and patiently" secured a trade deal with the US.

He congratulated Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying the agreement protected the interests of farmers and workers and enhanced the country's self-respect.

Goyal explained that the US trade deal would benefit Indian farmers, who already export USD 50–55 billion in farm and fish products, adding that India's 18 per cent tariff gives it an edge over competitors like China, which face duties of up to 35 per cent.

Goyal emphasised that the deal remains a work in progress, noting that essential safeguards are already in place. He reaffirmed that India has not granted any duty concessions on dairy, meat, poultry, soy meal, corn, or genetically modified products.

India has opened its sectors in a very calibrated manner, the minister said.

He defended the trade deal as a "calibrated opening," arguing that market access is a necessary "give and take" to benefit Indian agriculture. —*PTI*

Sena MLA votes in presence of son; 3 suspended

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 8 FEB

Three persons on Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti poll duty were suspended on Sunday after Shiv Sena MLA Vilas Bhumre took his minor son into the EVM booth in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar's Paithan taluka a day earlier, violating secrecy and other norms.The incident took place on Saturday at the Pachod booth, where fingers of both Bhumre and his son were inked, and a video went viral, prompting district collector Dilip Swami to order a probe. A district administration release said booth head Dilipa Narwade, booth officer Sangita Kedar and homeguard Renuka Bomble were suspended pending inquiry. —*PTI*

Bhujbal condemns T'gana's Phule statue vandalism

MUMBAI, 8 FEB

Maharashtra Minister and NCP leader Chhagan Bhujbal on Sunday condemned the desecration of social reformer Mahatma Jyotiba Phule's statue in Telangana, calling it an attack on the idea of social equality. The incident occurred in Sangareddy district on 6 February. Bhujbal urged Union Home Minister Amit Shah to intervene and sought immediate and strict action against those responsible. In a letter to Shah, Bhujbal said targeting icons like Phule amounted to an assault on progressive social thought and was unacceptable in a democratic society. He stressed that Phule's contribution to social justice, equality and the empowerment of the oppressed was invaluable, and said exemplary punishment was needed to uphold constitutional values. —*PTI*

SIT leaking Sabarimala case details: Cong MP

KOLLAM, 8 FEB

UDF convenor and Congress MP Adoor Prakash on Sunday alleged that some officials in the Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the Sabarimala gold loss case were leaking interrogation details to the media at the behest of the LDF government. Rejecting reports that he was questioned alongside prime accused Unnikrishnan Potty, Prakash said the claims were false and politically motivated. He maintained that he appeared before the SIT as directed and cooperated fully. The SIT, constituted under Kerala High Court supervision, is investigating the loss of gold from the Dwarapalaka idols and sreekovil doorframes, and has arrested 12 people so far. Prakash claimed the probe had become politically influenced and aimed at diverting the investigation. —*PTI*

'SP-winning booths being targeted during SIR'

LUCKNOW, 8 FEB

Samajwadi Party President **Akhilesh Yadav** on Sunday alleged large-scale misuse of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise in Uttar Pradesh, claiming government-hired agencies were selectively targeting polling booths where his party had earlier won elections.

Addressing a press conference, Yadav said professional agencies operating from Delhi, Lucknow and other locations had access to the entire electoral roll database. "Using this data, they are identifying booths where the Samajwadi Party won. Form-7 is being systematically filled and sent from such booths," he alleged, leading to protests and disturbances in several places.

Form-7, according to the Election Commission (EC), is used to object to a person's inclusion in the electoral roll or seek deletion of a name.

The former UP chief minister alleged that the SIR exercise had already influenced election outcomes elsewhere. "Through the SIR, they managed to win the Bihar elections. The same is being

attempted in poll-bound West Bengal," he said, adding that the EC had become a "Sahyogi Dal" of the BJP.

Yadav said Samajwadi workers and PDA 'praharis' had flagged several suspicious, pre-filled forms. PDA refers to a coalition of backward classes, Dalits and minorities.

Citing alleged cases of forgery, Yadav named individuals, including Nandlal, and announced financial assistance of Rs 1 lakh to him. He also demanded an immediate halt to the use of Form-7 and cancellation of actions taken under it.

Raising concerns over booth-level officers, Yadav alleged inadequate training and mounting pressure, urging the EC to remain impartial and protect constitutional values. —*PTI*

Ready to deploy 8,505 officers for SIR: WB

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

The West Bengal government has informed the Election Commission (EC) that it is ready to deploy 8,505 Group B officers from the State and its instrumentalities for the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, sources said.

The submission gains significance as the poll panel told the Supreme Court on 4 February that the State had provided services of only 80 Grade 2 officers, such as sub-divisional magistrates, to oversee the exercise.

A bench of Justices including CJI Surya Kant will hear on Monday a batch of pleas, including one filed by CM Mamata Banerjee, challenging the SIR process in the State.

Senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, appearing for the EC, had told the court that the State provided staff such as Anganwadi workers for the exercise. Banerjee countered the allegation, saying the State supplied whatever sought by the poll panel.

The SC has taken note of Banerjee's petition and said genuine voters must remain on the electoral rolls. It has sought responses from the EC and the State's chief electoral officer by 9 February.

The bench also asked the poll panel to instruct booth-level and electoral roll officers to act sensitively while issuing notices for minor discrepancies, including spelling mismatches, and ensure the process remains transparent and does not cause inconvenience. —*PTI*

Stalin seeks release of pending funds

CHENNAI, 8 FEB

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister **MK Stalin** wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday, seeking his intervention to expedite sanctioned railway projects in the state by releasing necessary funds and reviving stalled works.

"The delays in releasing funds and piecemeal allocations have hindered railway projects in Tamil Nadu, causing prolonged uncertainty for affected landowners," Satlin said.

The CM urged the Prime Minister to release funds for sanctioned projects in full and on priority, and to reconsider and restart stalled projects, including the Thoothukudi–Madurai and Tindivanam–Tiruvannamalai broad gauge lines.

He noted that while the state government has granted administrative approval for acquiring 2,500.61 hectares for various federal railway projects, the Railway Department is yet to allocate funds for 931.52 hectares, an official release said.

Stalin said land acquisition is 94 per cent complete for 19 projects, with 1,198 hectares handed to the Railways, but cited the Thiruvanan thapuram–Kanniyakumari line, where 16.86 hectares remain stalled due to delayed compensation of Rs 289.78 crore. —*PTI*

WB TMC councillor held for assault as elderly man dies

KOLKATA, 8 FEB

An elderly man died in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district after being allegedly assaulted by a TMC councillor for protesting illegal construction, his family alleged in a police complaint on Sunday.

Rabindra Nath Bhattacharya, the councillor of North Barrackpore Municipality's ward number 23, was arrested after interrogation by police following registration of a case of unnatural death.

80-year-old Tulsi Adhikari, the deceased, was protesting the illegal construction in front of his house, which has been underway for days. On Saturday, Bhattacharya arrived at the spot, and a heated exchange started with Adhikari. As the situation escalated, Bhattacharya allegedly assaulted Adhikari and his son, Hemanta, the police said. Bhattacharya repeatedly punched, slapped and kicked the elderly man, following which he collapsed, the complaint said, quoting charges of the family members of the deceased.

Before the arrest, he denied the claims, calling it "baseless & politically motivated".—*PTI*

Shah chairs Left Wing Extremism meet in Chh'garh

RAIPUR, 8 FEB

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday chaired a high-level security review meeting in Chhattisgarh's capital Raipur on Left-Wing Extremism (LWE). The meeting, held at a hotel in Nava Raipur Atal Nagar, aimed to assess progress ahead of the Centre's 31 March deadline to eliminate Maoist insurgency nationwide. Attending the meeting were Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma, Union Home Secretary, Director of the Intelligence Bureau (IB), and Special Secretary (Internal Security) in the Ministry of Home Affairs. The directors general of CRPF, BSF, ITBP, and NIA, along with senior officers from Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, and Telangana, also participated. The Bastar region, comprising seven districts and sharing borders with Maha rashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Odisha, remains the Maoist stronghold. However, intensified anti-Naxal operations over recent years have weakened the insurgency. Since January 2024, over 500 Naxalites, including CPI (Maoist) general secretary Nambala Keshava Rao, have been killed, with around 1,900 arrested and more than 2,500 surrendering during this period, police reports indicate. —*PTI*

'SENSITIVE INFO PASSED TO PAK'

Gaurav, wife have deep link with Pak: Himanta

GUWAHATI, 8 FEB

Assam Chief Minister **Himanta Biswa Sarma** on Sunday alleged that Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi, his British wife Elizabeth Colburn and Pakistani national Ali Tauqeer Sheikh shared a "deeper connection", claiming sensitive information was passed to Pakistan and Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) norms were violated.

Addressing a press conference, Sarma said Colburn was paid a salary by Sheikh-linked

entities while working in India, allegedly bypassing FCRA rules. "We believe there is a deeper connection between Gogoi, Colburn and Sheikh. They were part of an international conspiracy," he said.

The CM also alleged Gogoi undertook a "very confidential" visit to Pakistan in December 2013 and challenged him to clarify the trip, warning of "rashtra-droh" charges otherwise. Sarma claimed Colburn worked with LEAD Pakistan before being transferred to India, but her salary continued to be paid by Sheikh.

> **I pity the journalists from Delhi and Assam who had to suffer the most flop press conference of the century. This was worse than a C grade cinema.**
>
> - Gaurav Gogoi, Assam Congress resident

Gogoi dismissed the claims, calling the press conference "worse than a C-grade cinema" and a "super flop", and accused the chief minister of making "mindless and bogus" claims ahead of polls. —*PTI*

'LEADER OF SANGH WILL BE HINDU'

Ready to step down if Sangh asks me to do so, says Bhagwat

MUMBAI, 8 FEB

RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday said the Sangh had asked him to continue working despite his age, while stressing that he would step down from the post whenever the organisation directs him to do so.

He also said that the person heading the Sangh will always be a Hindu, irrespective of his caste, with the top post going to the best available candidate.

"There is no election to the post of RSS chief. Regional and divisional heads appoint the chief. Generally, it is said that after turning 75, one should work without holding any post," Bhagwat said.

He was responding to questions during an interactive session with attendees here at a programme to mark the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) centenary.

RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat —*PTI*

"I have completed 75 years and informed the RSS, but the organisation asked me to continue working. Whenever the RSS asks me to step down, I will do so, but retirement from work will never happen," he said. The RSS does not have community-based representation, and volunteers rise through ranks based on their work, Bhagwat said, adding that the RSS chief has to be a Hindu, irrespective of caste.

Additionally, Bhagwat said the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) should be framed by taking everyone into confidence and it should not lead to differences. —*PTI*

Vijayan slams Centre's remarks on paddy cost

T'PURAM, 8 FEB

Kerala Chief Minister **Pinarayi Vijayan** on Sunday criticised the Centre's stance that an increase in paddy production caused a "burden" on the country.

In a statement, the CM said the central government has demanded that Kerala discontinue the additional incentive bonus being given to paddy farmers.

He revealed that the Union Finance Ministry formally informed the State Chief Secretary that high paddy production has made procurement costs a "burden on the public exchequer."

Vijayan questioned the Centre's opposition to Kerala's paddy bonuses paid above the Minimus Support Price. He further questioned if this stance is the first step to opening the market for American agricultural products under the new Indo-US trade agreement.

Vijayan's remarks followed LDF convener TP Ramakrishnan's call for the

- Pinarayi Vijayan further questioned if this stance is the first step to opening the market for American agricultural products under the new Indo-US trade agreement.

Centre to withdraw its order ending Kerala's incentive bonus for paddy procurement, warning it would undermine food self-sufficiency.

Kerala Agriculture Minister P Prasad had rejected the Centre's suggestion and said no compromise would be made on paddy cultivation. —*PTI*

—FREEPIK

Kolkata police want to check IDs of domestic helps

KOLKATA, 8 FEB

The Kolkata police have recommended compulsory verification of household employees via its digital registration system, following findings that domestic staff feature in nearly one-third of recent thefts. Internal police data shows 32 of 104 thefts from December 2025 to January 2026 involved maids, servants, or caregivers, with similar trends in February. The pattern raises concerns about security risks, especially for homes with elderly residents. Residents have been told to complete the "Domestic Help Profile" registration through the Kolkata Police app or website, including ID proof, address, and photos for background checks. Awareness drives are being enhanced, especially in areas with many elderly residents living alone. —PTI

—FREEPIK

Man arrested in wheat theft case after 45 years

KHARGONE, 8 FEB

An elderly man in Madhya Pradesh was arrested in a wheat theft case from 1980, over 45 years after the incident. Salim and six others stole wheat worth Rs 100 in Balsamund Kakad, when he was 20. He believed the case had been forgotten, thinking he was safe from legal action. Salim, now running a grocery shop with his son in Bag town, was traced during a cyber cell search and taken into custody. He was remanded in judicial custody after being presented in court. —PTI

—PTI

Punjab shivers as temperature dips to 5°C

CHANDIGARH, 8 FEB

Many parts of Punjab experienced cold weather on Sunday, with Faridkot and Hoshiarpur recording minimum temperatures of 5°C, officials said. Other places saw lows of 5.6°C in Ferozepur, 5.7°C in Amritsar, 6.2°C in Bathinda, 7°C in Gurdaspur, 9.4°C in Ludhiana, and 9.3°C in Patiala. Chandigarh recorded 8°C, while Haryana cities like Karnal, Gurugram, Narnaul, Hisar, and Ambala had lows of 7.2°C, 8.1°C, 8.5°C, 8.3°C, and 9.2°C respectively, the India Meteorological Department reported. —PTI

Man dies, wife injured in fire after geyser blast

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

A 50-year-old man died, and his wife was injured when a fire broke out in their house, triggered by an electric geyser explosion in southeast Delhi, police said on Sunday. The incident occurred around 5 pm on Saturday in the Hazrat Nizamuddin area. Police received a PCR call reporting a major fire at a house, and a team was rushed to the spot, they said. Police found the house locked and broke the door open. "Mohammad Sayed Nizami, the house owner, who was present in the bathroom, and his wife, Fida Nizami, 45, were found unconscious," a police officer said. The rest of the family was evacuated safely. Both victims were rushed to Mool Chand Hospital, where doctors declared Nizami dead, while his wife is undergoing treatment. —PTI

Two held in Rs 100 crore digital arrest scam

Case linked to 190 complaints about cyber fraud, extortion

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

The Delhi police have arrested two men in connection with a digital arrest scam linked to at least 190 cyber fraud complaints and suspected proceeds of over Rs 100 crore, police said on Sunday.

The accused, identified as Anish Singh and Mani Singh, were arrested after a woman filed a complaint that she was subjected to psychological intimidation for nearly two months and forced into transferring Rs 40 lakh in the name of a fake cybercrime investigation. The complainant, a homemaker, was initially contacted by a caller posing as an IPS officer from Mumbai Cyber Crime, who falsely accused her of involvement in criminal activities using her Aadhaar credentials.

The call was later transferred to a woman claiming to be a police officer, who used video and audio calls to show forged FIRs and arrest warrants, the officer said.

Police added that the accused warned the victim that her husband and son would also be implicated in criminal cases if she did not cooperate. She was instructed not to speak to anyone and was forced to report daily to the fraudsters to confirm her silence.

Delhi police officials with the arrested suspects. They falsely accused a woman of involvement in criminal activities —X/DELHI POLICE

"The victim transferred Rs 40 lakh. Even after receiving the money, the fraudsters continued to control her by giving false assurances of verification and refund," he said.

An e-FIR was registered at the Crime Branch after the victim finally reported the matter. The police reconstructed digital trails despite attempts by the accused to erase evidence. They traced several suspicious bank accounts and UPI IDs linked to shell entities.

- The suspects, Anish Singh and Mani Singh, were arrested after a woman filed a complaint that she was psychologically intimidated for two months and forced to transfer Rs 40 lakh

"One such account, held in the name of a private limited company, was found to be registered in west Delhi's New Mahavir Nagar. Anish Singh and Mani Singh are joint directors of the firm," the officer added. Transaction analysis revealed layered fund movement, and data from the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal showed 190 complaints involving over Rs 100 crore linked to the account, indicating organised fraud.

Police said both suspects were using fake SIM cards and forged documents and had been arrested by the Faridabad police in a similar case. — PTI

SAW BIKER LYING IN PIT

Labourer held for not reporting Delhi bike accident

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

The Delhi police on Sunday arrested a labourer employed by the sub-contractor who was arrested in connection with the death of a 25-year-old biker who fell into an uncovered 15-foot deep pit in Janakpuri, officials said.

The labourer, Yogesh, 23, was apprehended for allegedly not informing the police or emergency services regarding the accident and also for misleading the victim's family when they came inquiring about him, Deputy Commissioner of Police (West) Darade Sharad Bhaskar said.

Yogesh was at the spot at the time of the accident and was among the first to know that a biker had fallen into the pit dug by the Delhi Jal Board (DJB), the DCP said.

"Yogesh had informed the sub-contractor, Rajesh Kumar Prajapati, about the incident during the night but did not alert the police. When the victim's family reached the spot later that night searching for him Yogesh misled them by claiming he had no knowledge," DCP said. Yogesh subsequently fled the area.

Police on Saturday said that call detail records showed Yogesh had contacted sub-contractor Prajapati at around 12.22 am, and he reached the site soon.

However, police were informed about the incident only around 8 am, by which time the biker had died.

Yogesh had looked into the pit after being alerted by a guard and had seen a motorcycle with its headlight on and a human figure, police said.

The victim, Kamal Dhyani, a resident of Kailashpuri and an employee of a private bank, was returning home when he fell into the nearly 15-foot-deep pit in Janakpuri on Friday. — PTI

Sex on fake marriage promise is rape: HC

KOLKATA, 8 FEB

The Calcutta High Court dismissed an appeal by a man convicted for rape based on a false promise of marriage, holding that it cannot be treated as consent.

The accused was sentenced to seven years' rigorous imprisonment for rape under Section 376 of IPC in 2014 by the Kandi sessions court in Murshidabad district on a complaint filed on 1 January 2006, that he cohabited with the woman after giving a false promise of marriage.

The court observed, "The intention of the accused right from the beginning was not bona fide, and the poor woman submitted to the lust of the accused who gave a false promise of marriage if she gave him a child."

An FIR was registered with the Burwan police station after the accused, already married to another woman, refused to marry the complainant when she and her family had approached him for marriage as she was pregnant with his child.

Justice Chaitali Chatterjee (Das) dismissed the man's appeal.

"The consent obtained by the accused with a clear intention not to fulfil the promise that he is going to marry her, is consent through misconception," the court said.

- The defence lawyer said the complainant, aged 21, was aware about the marital status of the appellant and that she had voluntarily entered into a relationship with the man

The defence lawyer said the complainant, aged 20 to 21 years, was an adult, and that she had voluntarily entered into a sexual relationship with him. He also submitted that the complainant was aware about the marital status of the appellant. The prosecution contended that the appellant was never interested in marrying the victim and that he gave her a false promise of marriage. — PTI

Swing crash: Operator booked; cop cremated

FARIDABAD, 8 FEB

The Faridabad police have registered an FIR against a swing operator and his staff, a day after a police inspector died and 11 others were injured when a giant 'Tsunami' swing snapped mid-air and collapsed at the Surajkund fairgrounds here, officials said. Inspector Jagdish Prasad who died was given a state funeral.

The accused have been booked under Section 105 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Samhita.

Tragedy struck the Surajkund International Crafts Mela on Saturday, when about 19 people were riding the swing when it suddenly tilted and crashed to the ground. Inspector Jagdish Prasad, who joined the Haryana Armed Police in 1989 showed great bravery in trying to save those trapped, but was seriously injured, a senior police officer said.

Police personnel at the spot after a swing fell down at the Surajkund fair in Faridabad. Inspector Jagdish Prasad (inset) —PTI

The main accused in the FIR has been identified as Mohammad Shakir, the proprietor of Himachal Fun Care, which operated the giant swing, hailing from Himachal Pradesh's Sirmour district.

Police constituted a Special Investigative Team (SIT) to investigate the case, headed by DCP (Crime) Mukesh Kumar, with ACP (Crime) Varun Dahiya, and sub-inspector Sanjay Kumar from the Surajkund police station as members.

The complaint filed by Assistant Sub-inspector Sunny said he was present at the fairground with Inspector Prasad when people were seen enjoying the 'Tsunami' swing ride. As the swing snapped mid-air, Prasad was seen trying to rescue those trapped in the swing. However, the swing suddenly collapsed after it broke, and fell on them. — PTI

NARCOTIC FACTORY RAIDED, DRUGS WORTH RS 12 CR SEIZED

MANDSAUR, 8 FEB

Police have busted an illegal MD (mephedrone) drug manufacturing factory in Madhya Pradesh's Mandsaur district and seized narcotics, chemicals and equipment worth nearly Rs 12 crore.

A raid was conducted on Saturday evening at a field in Surjana village, where more than 100 gm of MD and a thick chemical mixture used in its manufacture were seized from the illegally operating unit, the officials said on Sunday.

Two persons were found making MD at the spot using a steel vessel. .

The police seized 102 grams of MD, 12.61 kg of a chemical mixture, 3.54 kg of a transparent liquid and 680 gm of a white chemical powder used in drug manufacturing, besides a gas cylinder, a centrifuge machine, a stove furnace, steel utensils, electric wiring, an earthing rod and two phones. — PTI

Centre hikes fees for its lawyers after 11 years

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

The Union Law Ministry has revised the fees paid to advocates representing the central government in courts across the country, ending an 11-year gap since the last increase.

According to a notification issued on 5 February, by the Department of Legal Affairs, Group 'A' counsels appearing in regular appeals and defended petitions at the final hearing stage will now be paid Rs 21,600 per case per day. Group 'B' and 'C' counsels will receiver Rs14,400 per case per day. Earlier, the fees were Rs 13,500 for Group 'A' counsels and Rs 9,000 for Group 'B' and 'C'.

The fees were last revised in October 2015. The latest notification also revises payments for other categories of cases, conferences with central ministries, and appearances in courts outside a counsel's headquarters.

A senior official said the increase was long overdue, considering inflation and rising costs.

Former Union Law Secretary Anju Rathi Rana said the hike was essential to retain competent advocates. — PTI

Dead minor sisters' grandfather demands ban on Korean game

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

The grandfather of the three minor sisters who allegedly jumped to their death from a ninth-floor flat in Ghaziabad urged the government to ban the Korean task-based game that the girls were reportedly addicted to. He said that it could prevent other children from taking extreme steps.

"I request the government to ban the game so that no more deaths or suicides occur," said Dilip, the maternal grandfather of the three sisters.

Even though initial investigations have not revealed the use of any Korean task-based app by the girls, a nine-page pocket diary recovered from the room of three sisters indicates an intense attachment to Korean culture and anguish over family strife.

Police said the diary also showed the loneliness and the stress of Nishika, 16, Prachi, 14, and Pakhi, 12, living in a large family struggling with heavy debt.

After the girls jumped to their deaths, their father, Chetan Kumar, claimed they had been playing a Korean game for around three years and had not attended school since then.

After the incident, several people, including members of a political outfit, staged protests in the city on Sunday against online games. — PTI

Prashant Kishor launches Bihar Navnirman Yatra

BETTIAH, 8 FEB

Jan Suraaj founder Prashant Kishor launched the 'Bihar Navnirman Yatra' on Sunday from West Champaran district, saying the campaign would focus on rebuilding and strengthening the organisation across the state.

Despite attracting public attention, Jan Suraaj failed to win even a single seat in the 2025 Bihar Assembly elections.

"The yatra will focus on rebuilding the party to present an honest alternative in Bihar," Kishor said.

He asserted that the party has remained active even after the Assembly elections, and the yatra will now help it expand its grassroots network.

Kishor asserted that during his yatra, the party will address the issue of a poll promise related to financial assistance for women under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rozgar Yojana. — PTI

TRAGEDY IN FRONT OF DAUGHTER

UP woman dies while acting out hanging scene for reel

BANDA, 8 FEB

A 27-year-old woman died after losing consciousness while attempting to recreate a hanging scene for a social media reel in front of her four-year-old daughter, police said on Sunday.

The incident occurred on Friday in Baberu town of the Banda district in Uttar Pradesh, where the woman, identified as Mohini, was filming the act inside her home. Circle Officer Saurabh Singh said initial findings suggest the act was intended only for a reel. "Prima facie, it appears she attempted to enact a hanging scene for a reel. However, she lost consciousness during the act and later died. The body has been sent for autopsy," he said.

Police said Mohini's four-year-old daughter was present at the spot and had been asked to record the video. Her statement was corroborated by Mohini's husband, Jagdish, who told investigators that she handed her mobile phone to the child and used a saree to fashion a noose while filming.

An examination of the woman's phone revealed repeated online searches related to hanging on Google and Facebook, officers said.

As Mohini became unconscious, the child began crying, alerting neighbours, who rushed in and brought her down.

She was taken to a nearby hospital, where doctors declared her dead. Police said further investigation is under way, pending the post-mortem report. — PTI

UIDAI completes 1 crore biometric updates for kids

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

UIDAI has completed mandatory biometric updates (MBU) for one crore school children covering 83,000 schools across the country, an official statement said.

A child under the age of five can enrol for Aadhaar but fingerprints and iris biometrics are not captured below the age of five as they are not mature then.

Therefore, providing fingerprints and iris information in Aadhaar after crossing the ages of 5 and 15 years, is an essential requirement for children.

Lack of MBU in Aadhaar may lead to difficulties in receiving the benefits of government schemes and registering in competitive examinations like NEET, JEE, CUET etc. — PTI

A house that was set afire during the riots —PTI

UP COURT CLEARS 22 IN 2013 RIOTS CASE

MUZAFFARNAGAR, 8 FEB

A court has acquitted 22 people in a murder, loot and arson case linked to the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, citing lack of evidence.

Additional District and Sessions Judge Kanishk Kumar passed the order on Saturday, observing that the prosecution had failed to prove the charges beyond reasonable doubt, government counsel Narendra Sharma said. The case pertained to incidents reported from Mohammadpur Raisingh village on 8 September 2013. A SIT had filed a charge sheet against 26 accused. However, four of them died during the course of the trial, leaving 22 to face the proceedings.

According to the prosecution, a complaint was lodged by Haneef, who alleged that a large mob attacked houses in the village, looted belongings and set homes on fire. It was further alleged that his father, Rahishuddin, was beaten to death during the violence.

The accused were also charged with damaging a mosque and setting ablaze a motorcycle belonging to a police constable. — PTI

ICE OUT! FIGHT STILL ON

People gather outside the Bishop Whipple Federal building to protest against the killing of two Minnesota residents, Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti, who were shot dead by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents. Good was shot dead by an ICE agent on 7 January when she was driving away. Just weeks after Good's death, Pretti, an intensive care nurse, was shot multiple times and killed by ICE agents. The deaths of these two residents have sparked nationwide outrage over US President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown —*PTI*

India likely to scale back Russian oil purchase

Most refiners will continue to honour purchase commitments made before the India-US trade pact announcement — orders typically placed six to eight weeks in advance — but will not place new orders thereafter —*FREEPIK*

India is likely to begin scaling back its crude oil purchases from Russia under an agreement reached with the United States in exchange for lower trade tariffs, sources said, adding that these imports will continue for now, as refiners like Nayara Energy have limited alternatives.

US President Donald Trump on Friday signed an executive order rescinding a punitive 25 per cent duty on all imports from India, saying the move followed New Delhi's commitment to stop imports of Russian oil.

While Indian refiners, which process crude oil into fuels such as petrol and diesel, have not received any formal directive to halt Russian purchases, they have been informally advised to begin scaling back buys from Moscow, three sources with knowledge of the matter said.

Most refiners will continue to honour purchase commitments made before the announcement - orders typically placed six to eight weeks in advance - but will not place new orders thereafter, they said.

Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL), Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) and HPCL-Mittal Energy Ltd (HMEL) had stopped buying oil from Russia soon after the US last year slapped sanctions on Moscow's key exporters, while others like Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) will wind down their purchases, sources said.

Reliance Industries Ltd, India's biggest buyer, which late last year paused purchases after US sanctions on Rosneft and Lukoil, is also likely to cease purchases after its resumption cargo of 1,50,000 barrels is delivered in the next couple of weeks.

The only exception to this rule is likely to be Nayara Energy. Nayara was first sanctioned by the EU and then by the UK for its Russian links (Rosneft holds 49.13 per cent in Nayara). Because of these sanctions, no other major supplier is willing to do any commercial transaction with the company, resulting in it being forced to buy Russian oil from non-sanctioned entities.

While the Oil Ministry has refused to comment on the issue, the Commerce Ministry and the Ministry of External Affairs have not directly commented on commitments made by India with regard to Russian oil purchases.

Sources said India's oil imports from Russia have been on the decline since the US sanctions on Rosneft and Lukoil came into effect.

In December 2025, they averaged 1.2 million barrels per day, down from a peak of USD 2.1 million barrels per day in May 2023. In January, they further came down to USD 1.1 million barrels, and the expectation was that they may decline to less than USD 1 million this month or the next. With the new understanding with the US, the imports may halve soon.

India meets about 90 per cent of its crude oil needs through imports, and purchases of discounted Russian oil - sold at lower prices after Western countries imposed sanctions on Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 - have helped reduce its import costs. Nayara, sources said, is likely to continue purchases of Russian oil from non-sanctioned entities in the near future. The refinery's unique position was explained to US trade officials during talks in December, they said, adding that Nayara may have to be given an exemption from the 'no-Russian oil-buy' policy or a special dispensation be created.

According to Sumit Ritolia, Lead Research Analyst, Refining and Modeling at Kpler, the India-US trade deal announced is unlikely to result in a near-term reduction in India's Russian crude imports.

Prashant Vasisht of Icra said the US-India trade deal reportedly includes India stepping up purchase of US crude oil and potentially start buying oil from Venezuela.

The discounts on Russian crude oil were marginal prior to the US announcing sanctions on some Russian crude suppliers in October 2025, and Icra estimates that replacement of Russian crude with market-priced crude would lead to an increase in the import bill of the country by less than 2 per cent.

Additionally, Venezuelan crudes are heavy and sour and therefore, cheaper and would be of interest to Indian refiners, many of whom can process these types of crudes, he added. —*PTI*

SALAR

Will climate change threaten Winter Games?

The 25th Winter Olympic Games are upon us, with Italy set to host the Games for the fourth time. The schedule at the 2026 Milano Cortina Winter Olympics is set to look similar to previous iterations of the event: a mix of snow and ice sports held on what is meant to be mountainous, wintry terrain.

Except the snowy cold winter that comes to mind when you picture the Olympic Games may not be tenable for much longer.

Climate change is reshaping winter sports worldwide. In the Northern Hemisphere, the winter season has shortened over the last 50 years, with low elevation regions warming at twice the rate of global warming, leading to widespread declines in snowpack.

Snow sport athletes are experiencing these changes firsthand. In recent years, several International Ski and Snowboard Federation World Cup events have been cancelled due to poor snow and unsafe conditions.

In 2023, nearly 300 concerned athletes sent a letter to the federation demanding more action on climate change and a "geographically reasonable" race schedule aligned with evolving weather realities.

A 2021 survey of 339 professional and Olympic winter athletes and coaches from 20 countries found 90 per cent were concerned about how climate change would affect the future of winter sports.

For the Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, climate change could fundamentally impact where the Games can be held in the future.

In 2022, the International Olympic Committee delayed the selection of the 2030 host city so that it could obtain a clearer understanding of the climate risk of potential future host locations.

Our 2024 study of 93 potential host locations — those with the necessary infrastructure in place to host such a spectacle — found that even with advanced snowmaking, a significant number would no longer have reliable snow in future.

OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC PERIL

Our recent study explores a wide range of strategies to mitigate the risks posed by climate change to the Winter Olympics and Paralympics. Each strategy requires careful evaluation by Olympic and Paralympic committees, host cities and sport federations.

Many involve trade-offs that can impact the ability of communities to host the games, the athlete and spectator experience, and potentially, the sustainability of the Games.

For example, the location of snow sports venues further away from the main host city, where the indoor events are held, could enhance climate reliability. However, that would increase travel times and emissions, as well as reduce the ability of spectators to see some competitions.

At this year's Milano Cortina Games, venues are dispersed between sites across northern Italy. That will make it more challenging for athletes and fans to mingle, a setback to team unity and spirit.

Several more athletes than usual won't be able to attend the opening or closing ceremonies because they'll be competing several hundred kilometres away.

CHANGING THE SCHEDULE

Given that the Paralympics are held after the Olympics, they are especially at risk due to climate change. The "one bid, one city" agreement, which requires a host city to stage both Games at the same venues, may need to be reconsidered.

This agreement has elevated para sport to new levels of visibility and excellence. However, our research suggests that it cannot survive climate change, and losing the Paralympics would be a devastating setback for winter sports.

The solution? Adjust the schedule so the Paralympics can be held earlier.

Our analysis revealed that holding the Winter Olympics and Paralympics three weeks earlier in the year has tremendous potential to increase the number of climate reliable hosts.

Moving the Olympics so the Games begin in late January or the first week of February, and the Paralympics in late February or the first week of March, nearly doubled the number of climate-reliable host locations for the Paralympics.

WHAT ABOUT SNOWMAKING?

The increased reliance on snow-making has drawn criticism, particularly after the 2022 Beijing Games used nearly 100 per cent machine-made snow. Snow-making has been used at every Winter Olympics since 1980 in Lake Placid, and will be increasingly integral in the future.

Our analysis found that without snow-making, the snow sports program of the Winter Games as we currently know it is simply not possible.

\In the absence of snow-making, the number of climate-reliable potential hosts for the Olympic Games declines to four or fewer by 2050.

Snow-makers are putting effort into improving the technology to reduce negative environmental impact, but more work is needed to make the practice more efficient.

While it has its drawbacks, without snow-making, the Games would increasingly become unfair and unsafe for athletes.

Events and competitions would need to be cancelled, and eventually, it would become impossible to include snow sports in the Winter Games. —*PTI*

In 2023, nearly 300 concerned athletes sent a letter to the federation demanding more action on climate change and a 'geographically reasonable' race schedule aligned with evolving weather realities —*ANI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

One is enough: India's young & old embrace solo dining & travelling

Cafes, restaurants, hotels and even travel apps are noticing the shift with spaces and services increasingly designed to cater to solo patrons —*AI*

Not long ago, a table for one drew awkward glances from fellow guests and zero attention from servers, while a solo travel itinerary invited quiet pity. It's very different today.

And it's not just about burying your nose in a book or working on a laptop in a coffee shop or co-working space. Indians, led by millennials and Gen Zs, are out and about, busy rewriting the rules -- one solo plan at a time.

Be it 25-year-old student Kanika Saluja or 72-year-old retired banker Amit Gupta, one is enough. And they are making it count.

Most important, for both, going solo does not translate to being lonely. In fact, it is a statement of liberation. Unapologetic and entirely by choice.

"I've done the years of running around for work and family. Now, if I step out alone, it's for pleasure -- a meal I enjoy or a short trip at my own pace. There's no coordination, no pressure. Just peace," Noida-based Gupta told PTI.

Gupta, who is going the solitary way quietly and without hashtags, added with emphasis that he loves going out by himself for food, travel or quiet recreation.

Saluja said she would feel awkward eating out alone. Her concerns were the usual: the place, the people, the service. But one day she tried it, and she was hooked.

Since then, solo lunches and dinners have become her little "me-time" ritual.

Armed with disposable income and endless options at their fingertips, the growing not so young brigade is on the move, reclaiming time for themselves and turning it into a full blown lifestyle choice.

Cafes, restaurants, boutique hotels and even travel apps are noticing the shift with spaces and services increasingly designed to cater to solo patrons.

According to The Bar Consultants (TBC), a hospitality advisory firm with over 400 assignments across India and abroad, the mindset has indeed shifted.

For instance, solo dining -- from bar seating and cosy single tables to flexible menu portions and attentive service that understands guest preferences -- is now part of early planning conversations, no longer an "afterthought".

Restaurants across the spectrum are taking note.

At Zuki, the new pan-Asian hotspot in Noida, solo dining isn't a trend.

It's freedom for individuals to choose "to eat what they want, when they want, without negotiating portions, preferences, or pace".

Menus are recalibrated with tasting formats, half portions and mix-and-match add-on choices.

Seating is deliberately designed to work intuitively like counter seats with a kitchen view, cosy tables, and layouts that never isolate solo guests from groups.

On the other hand, Arjun Sagar Gupta, founder of The Piano Man, doesn't see solo dining as a trend so much as a long-standing habit. One that's only grown bigger in scale, driven by "urban lifestyles, flexible work hours, and a comfort with doing things alone".

It also makes business sense, he argued.

Anuj Sethi, a true blue solo enthusiast, with five domestic and international solo trips under his belt and someone who often visits his neighbourhood café alone with a laptop and endless coffee refills, is convinced this isn't a passing fad.

For him, the movement is only heading one way: "forward".

And his claim is not off the mark, because travel, with numbers steadily climbing, is perhaps at the forefront of the solo movement.

According to travel-banking fintech platform Niyo's 2025 report, for instance, solo travel has emerged as the dominant preference among Indian travellers, with "63.8 per cent" of trips undertaken by individuals.

Hotels are seeing the shift up close.

Sarovar Hotels, one of the country's leading chains, reports a "12–15 per cent year-on-year rise" in solo guests in 2024–25 compared to the previous year, largely driven by young adults and working professionals aged 25 to 40.

The momentum is even stronger for vacation rental platform Airbnb, which recorded an impressive 35 per cent jump in solo travel bookings in India during the first half of 2025.

Amanpreet Singh Bajaj, Airbnb's country head for India and Southeast Asia, said that what was once seen as unconventional has now gone mainstream, with solo travel increasingly celebrated as a symbol of "empowerment, personal growth and independence". He also credits social media for helping normalise the trend.

"The platform notes that a growing number of travellers are also sharing their solo experiences online and on social media, helping normalise the practice and turning it into an aspirational, widely accepted way for Indians to explore the world on their own terms," he said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Feels like you are in Pak, not Dallas: US Congressman

NEW YORK, 8 FEB

US Congressman Brandon Gill has expressed concern over what he describes as the "Islamisation" of certain areas in Texas, saying visiting local malls "feels like you're in Pakistan, not Dallas." During an interview with Real America's Voice, he stated, "I hear from constituents all the time who are deeply and desperately concerned about the Islamisation of the Dallas area." He added, "We have entire communities who are being transformed. And you hear about constituents talking about going to their local malls, and you look around, and it feels like you're in Pakistan, not Dallas, Texas. That's a problem." Gill, a Republican representing Texas' 26th District, was elected in 2024 and sits on the House Judiciary, Budget, and Oversight Committees.—*PTI*

Iraq traders protest new tariffs

BAGHDAD, 8 FEB

Hundreds of traders and customs clearance company owners protested in Baghdad on Sunday, demanding that Iraq's government reverse newly imposed customs tariffs that they say have sharply increased costs and disrupted trade. The tariffs, effective 1 January, aim to curb debt and cut reliance on oil as prices fall. Iraq's debt exceeds USD 69 billion, and oil provides about 90 per cent of state income.Traders say tariffs of up to 30 per cent are unfair, as protesters rallied outside the General Customs Directorate chanting against corruption. A lawsuit challenging the decision is before the Supreme Court is set for Wednesday. Protesters said higher tariffs have caused port backlogs and raised prices, hurting low-income citizens.—*PTI*

Netanyahu to meet Trump over recent US-Iran talks

Israel says talks must include Iran's ballistic missiles

JERUSALEM, 8 FEB

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will meet with US President Donald Trump in Washington on Wednesday about the recent US-Iran talks, his office said on Saturday. Meanwhile, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Tehran's strength comes from saying no to great powers.

"The Prime Minister believes that all negotiations must include limiting the ballistic missiles and ending support for the Iranian axis," Netanyahu's office said in a brief statement. Iran has one of the largest ballistic missile arsenal in the region.

The US and Iran held indirect talks on Friday in Oman that appeared to be about Iran's nuclear programme. The US was represented by Mideast special envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law. For the first time, Trump also sent military generals for the negotiations.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will meet with US President Donald Trump in Washington on Wednesday for US-Iran talks —*PTI*

Trump has also deployed the massive aircraft carrier and other warships to the region amid Tehran's crackdown on nationwide protests.

Araghchi appeared warry of this, noting that both the US and Israel have struck when negotiations were ongoing.

Trump described the talks as "very good" and said more were planned early next week.

However, Gulf nations fear a US attack could spark a regional war, with memories fresh from Israel's 12-day war with Iran last June. Israel insisted at the time that Iran was building a nuclear bomb to train at Israel.

While it remains unclear what terms Iran is willing to negotiate at the talks, Araghchi, speaking to diplomats at a summit in Tehran, signalled that Iran would stick to its position that it must be able to enrich uranium.

"I believe the secret of the Islamic Republic of Iran's power lies in its ability to stand against bullying, domination and pressures from others," Araghchi said. "They fear our atomic bomb, while we are not pursuing an atomic bomb. Our atomic bomb is the power to say no to the great powers."

Araghchi's choice to explicitly use of "atomic bomb" as a rhetorical device likely wasn't accidental.

Tehran has maintained that its nuclear enrichment programme was peaceful, even though Netanyahu has insisted otherwise for decades.

Notably, Iran had been enriching uranium up to 60 per cent purity, the only non-weapons state to do so. Weapons-grade levels are at an estimated 90 per cent purity rate. —*PTI*

NAMED 169 TIMES

Dalai Lama denies Epstein links

PARIS, 8 FEB

The Dalai Lama denied ever meeting late convicted sex trafficker Jefferey Epstein after several news outlets, including many Chinese backed portals, reported that the name "Dalai" appeared at least 169 times in the recent files related to the financier.

His office said the Dalai Lama has never met Epstein. or authorised any meeting or interaction with him by anyone on His behalf," said a Tibetan spiritual leader's in Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh.

Dozens of prominent figures are named in the files recently released by the US Justice Departmen. For instance, Epstein is seen telling a person in an email to attend the Dalai Lama's event.

Epstein killed himself in 2019 while facing charges of sexually abusing and trafficking underage girls.

FRENCH EX-MP RESIGNS

France's former culture minister Jack Lang has resigned as head of a Paris cultural centre amid allegations of financial links to Epstein that triggered a tax investigation, the Foreign Ministry confirmed Saturday.

He is the highest-profile French figure implicated.

A media outlet reported alleged financial ties between the Lang family and Epstein via a US offshore company. Lang's name appears more than 600 times in files from, including involving his daughter. —*PTI*

caption -*PTI*

Starlink entry into Pakistan delayed over security concerns

ISLAMABAD, 8 FEB

The licence for Starlink to enter Pakistan's satellite internet market is delayed over data security concerns, the ongoing Musk-Trump fallout and competition from Chinese firms.

Starlink, owned by tech billionaire **Elon Musk**, is among several companies seeking approval in Pakistan.

However, the government learnt that Starlink could transmit certain data bypassing Pakistan's monitoring, regulatory and safety checks, Express Tribune reported. Starlink is believed to be able to pick up sensitive data.

"We cannot allow a license to Starlink without ensuring a safety check to ensure the safety of the data," a government official said.

The row between US President Donald Trump and Musk is another reason the Pakistani establishment is not ready to grant clearance.

Currently, Pakistan retains control over internet data as Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL).

Satellite-based services would primarily be provided in remote areas such as, where conventional internet services are either limited or unavailable. Authorities can suspend connectivity for security, but this may be difficult with satellite-based services.

At present, five companies are seeking licences for satellite-based internet services in Pakistan.

These included Starlink and Shanghai Spacecom Satellite Technology Limited. Chinese firms have the upper hand in Pakistan over US firms.

Meanwhile, parts of Balochistan came to a standstill on Sunday after the Opposition's call for a complete strike to mark the one year anniversary of 8 February, 2024 Pakistan general elections, which they allege were rigged. —*PTI*

Tarique promises to 'rebuild Bangladesh'

DHAKA, 8 JAN

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Chairman Tarique Rahman vowed to "rebuild Bangladesh" if elected to power in the upcoming 14 February elections.

"We want to rebuild Bangladesh. We envision a country where no one is deprived of at least basic healthcare," Rahman said, addressing a rally at Thakurgaon Government High School on Saturday. "For more than a decade, people have been deprived of their political rights and freedom of expression. At the same time, they have fallen behind economically. Necessary initiatives to create jobs for young people, empower women and strengthen farmers were not taken by the previous authoritarian government."

His party intends to achieve food self-sufficiency, he said.

The two front runners for the upcoming polls are the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami. Rahman, the son of former prime minister Khaleda Zia, has been predicted to win the elections by several opinion polls. However, Jamaat has tied up with the NCP – the political offshoot of the student unions that led to the toppling of the Sheik Hassina-led Awami League regime.

The interim government led by Muhammad Yunus has barred the Awami League from contesting the election. —*Agencies*

Washington Post CEO resigns after mass layoffs

WASHINGTON, 8 FEB

Will Lewis, is stepping down as CEO, The Washington Post announced on Saturday following widespread layoffs this week. In a message shared by White House bureau chief Matt Viser, Lewis said, "During my tenure, difficult decisions have been taken in order to ensure the future of The Post so it can go on for many years to publish quality nonpartisan news."

Lewis, a former Dow Jones CEO and Wall Street Journal publisher, was appointed in 2023 amid the paper's financial struggles, succeeding Fred Ryan, who served nearly a decade. Jeff D'Onofrio, the newspaper's chief financial officer, will serve as acting publisher and CEO. D'Onofrio, who joined last June after roles at Google and Yahoo, stated, "Customer data will drive our decisions, sharpening our edge in delivering what is most valuable to our audiences."

The Post Guild called Lewis' exit "long overdue," criticising his tenure for destroying the paper's legacy. The departure comes after the paper lost about a third of its staff, layoffs former editor Marty Baron called "among the darkest days" in its history. —*Agencies*

FOUR INDIAN STUDENTS STABBED IN RUSSIA

MOSCOW, 8 FEB

Four Indian medical students injured in a stabbing spree by a juvenile at a Russian university are "stable and recovering well", the Indian mission said on Sunday.

These four Indians were among at least six people injured in the attack on Saturday at the State Medical University in Ufa, about 1,200km east of Moscow, in Russia's Bashkortostan Republic.

Indian consular officials from Kazan visited the four students at the hospital where they were admitted after the incident. "They are stable and recovering well. Our consul officer met them today in the hospital and also met other students in the hostel," the Indian mission said, adding, "We are in regular touch with them."

The 4 Indian students were among at at least six other injured in the attack at State Medical Collage in Ufa, on Saturday —*SCREENGRAB*

The attacker, a 15-year-old Class IX student from a local school, armed with a knife, entered the university dormitory on Repina Street and attacked students living there. While resisting arrest, he also wounded two police officers and a hostel guard. He later attempted suicide and is hospitalised in serious condition, Bashinform reported.

Authorities have reportedly opened a case of gross dereliction of duty against officials. —*PTI*

Russia detains suspect in senior general shooting incident

MOSCOW, 8 FEB

Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) announced on Sunday that the man suspected of shooting Lt. Gen. Vladimir Alekseyev, deputy chief of Russia's military intelligence agency, was detained in Dubai and handed over to Russia. Alekseyev was hospitalised after being shot multiple times on Friday in an apartment building in northwestern Moscow, following a series of assassinations of senior military officers blamed on Ukraine.

The FSB identified Lyubomir Korba, a Russian citizen, as the suspect and said two "accomplices" were involved—one detained in Moscow and another who "left for Ukraine." Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called the attack a "terrorist act" by Ukraine intended to derail peace talks. No response was received from Kyiv.

Alekseyev, 64, has served as first deputy head of the GRU since 2011 and was decorated for his role in Syria.

RUSSIA KILLS 1 IN UKRAINE

Russian drone strikes on a residential area in eastern Ukraine killed one person and wounded two, officials said on Sunday. The attack on the city of Kramatorsk in Ukraine's Donetsk region caused a fire in a nine-story apartment block. Russia also continued to hammer the country's energy infrastructure. —*PTI*

COALITION LIKELY

Thailand polls: 3 parties vie for power

BANGKOK, 8 FEB

Thailand went to polls on Sunday in an early general election seen as a three-way contest among progressive, populist and traditional patronage politics. Counting began later in the day.

The battle for support from 53 million registered voters comes amid slow economic growth and heightened nationalist sentiment, sharpened by tensions linked to recent border clashes with Cambodia.

While over 50 parties are contesting, only three — the People's Party, Bhumjaithai and Pheu Thai — are positioned to win a mandate.

A simple majority of the 500 elected lawmakers will select the next Prime Minister, though polls suggest no single party will secure a majority, making a coalition likely.

The progressive People's Party is projected to win a plurality but may be sidelined if rivals join forces. Led by Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut, it succeeds the dissolved Move Forward Party, which topped the 2023 polls but was blocked by Conservative lawmakers.

Police officers and Volunteers check ballots for Sunday's general election in Bangkok, Thailand on Saturday—*PTI*

Its platform promises reforms of the military, police and judiciary, while softening demands related to laws protecting the monarchy and placing greater emphasis on economic issues. Its criticism of the military has become more sensitive after last year's clashes along the Cambodia border.

Bhumjaithai, headed by incumbent Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, is seen as the preferred choice of the royalist-military establishment.

Anutin became Prime Minister after former premier Paetongtarn Shinawatra was forced out over an ethics violation linked to handling relations with Cambodia. Subsequent border clashes allowed Anutin to project himself as a wartime leader, shifting focus to national security and economic stimulus.

The Pheu Thai Party, linked to former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, campaigns on economic revival and populist pledges. Thaksin's nephew Yodchanan Wongsawat is its prime ministerial candidate.

Voting also includes a referendum on whether to begin drafting a new constitution. This is a move supporters see as reducing the influence of unelected institutions, while critics on this issue warn of instability —*PTI*

Portugal chooses between moderate and populist

LISBON, 8 FEB

Centre-left Socialist candidate António José Seguro is favoured to defeat hard-Right populist André Ventura in Portugal's runoff Presidential election this Sunday.

In May, Portugal held its third general election in three years, marking the country's worst bout of political instability in decades.

The Portuguese President's role includes vetoing legislation and dissolve parliament and call early elections.

Recent polls show Seguro nearly doubling Ventura's support.

Seguro has pledged to cooperate with Portugal's minority government while explicitly rejecting Ventura.

In contrast, the combative Ventura promises to focus on what he describes as the "excessive immigration" of foreign workers.

In March, the winner will replace President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, who has served the maximum of two five-year terms. —*PTI*

Weather disruptions and low youth turnout remain key uncertainties in Japan's upcoming elcetions —*SCREENGRAB*

Japan heads for snap parliamentary elections

TOKYO, 8 JAN

Polls opened Sunday in Japan's parliamentary elections, with Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi seeking a strong mandate to advance a Conservative agenda. Though popular, Takaichi called the snap polls just three months after taking office as the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) struggled with funding scandals.

Japan's first female prime minister, Takaichi, aims to boost economic growth and expand military capabilities amid rising tensions with China, while strengthening ties with the US. Surveys suggest a landslide lower house victory for LDP.

Takaichi is relying on the LDP and the Japan Innovation Party to win a lower-house majority, with polls suggesting up to 300 seats; she has vowed to step down if they fall short of a majority.

A strong win could push Japan further right on security, immigration and defence, but critics say key policies remain unclear. Weather and youth turnout remain major deciders. —*PTI*

—ANI

I-T dept calls for stakeholder views on draft rules

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

The Income Tax (I-T) Department has invited stakeholders to provide inputs on the draft rules and forms under the new Income Tax Act, 2025, which will come into effect on 1 April. The proposed Income Tax Rules, 2026, and corresponding forms have been uploaded on the official website to encourage wider participation. The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) is seeking suggestions in four areas: simplification of language, reduction of litigation, easing compliance burdens, and removal of redundant rules or forms. A submission utility is available on the e-filing portal, accessible from 4 February, 2026, with OTP-based verification. Stakeholders must specify the relevant rule, sub-rule, or form number.—*PTI*

Luxury hotels in demand ahead of AI Summit in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Five-star hotels in New Delhi are witnessing a sharp rise in room tariffs and near-full occupancy as thousands of delegates arrive for the India AI Impact Summit 2026 from February 16–20 at Bharat Mandapam. The summit has attracted strong global interest, with over 35,000 registrations, pushing demand well beyond available luxury accommodation. Rooms that usually cost Rs 20,000–Rs 40,000 per night are now being listed at several lakh rupees, with some premium categories touching Rs 4–5 lakh during peak dates. Top hotels such as The Leela Palace, ITC Maurya and Taj Palace are either sold out or enforcing minimum-stay conditions. Billed as the largest AI summit yet, the event will host participants from over 100 countries, including global leaders and tech executives.—*PTI*

Titan eyes $2B watch sales after EU trade pact

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Titan Company expects luxury Swiss watch sales to rise in India after the India-EU Free Trade Agreement cut import duties, a top official said. The Tata group firm, which runs Helios and Helios Luxe, said Swiss brands will become more competitive as duty benefits pass to consumers. Its Swiss segment is growing and talks with more brands are on for Helios formats, Titan Watches Chief Sales and Marketing Officer Rahul Shukla told PTI.

"Swiss watches will play a larger role, and the premium segment will drive the next phase of growth," he said.

Duties fell from about 22 per cent to 15 per cent under the India-EFTA FTA effective 1 October, 2025, with Switzerland part of EFTA, while the India-EU FTA may cut duties further.

Titan targets USD 1 billion watch sales next year and USD 2 billion by FY30, banking on premiumisation and luxury formats. "We are confident about the growth trajectory," Shukla said.

Watches above Rs 50,000 now form over half of Helios sales. In FY25, the watch and wearable segment posted Rs 4,576 crore revenue, up over 17 per cent, while Q3 demand stayed robust.

Titan also named chess champion Gukesh D as Titan of the Year and unveiled a limited edition watch in his honour. —*PTI*

High-level banking panel in the works: FM

Nirmala says PM's emphasis on avoiding 'policy ping-pong' shaped the Union Budget

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

The government will soon constitute a High-Level Committee on Banking for Viksit Bharat to draw up a blueprint to create mega-lenders capable of meeting the financing needs of a developed India, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said.

"We want the committee to tell us what kind of things we need to do so that banking is made available for funding Viksit Bharat," she told PTI Videos in an interview.

Asked if it would suggest a merger of public sector banks, Sitharaman said one should not narrow it down like that.

"It is for India's banking sector to be made big enough, big enough in the sense, made or primed to take care of Viksit Bharat funding. You have to reach Viksit Bharat destination...it (Viksit Bharat) needs money, it needs financing, it needs credit, it needs banking facility to reach the common man."

The panel will devise a blueprint to create mega-lenders capable of meeting the financing needs of Viksit Bharat, says FM Nirmala Sitharaman —*PTI*

"I propose setting up a 'High Level Committee on Banking for Viksit Bharat' to comprehensively review the sector and align it with India's next phase of growth, while safeguarding financial stability, inclusion and consumer protection," she had said in the Budget speech on 1 February.

To achieve scale and improve efficiency in the public sector NBFCs, as a first step, the Budget also proposed to restructure the Power Finance Corporation and Rural Electrification Corporation.

- "We want the committee to tell us what kind of things we need to do so that banking is made available for funding Viksit Bharat," Finance Minister told PTI Videos in an interview

Additionally, PM Narendra Modi's emphasis on avoiding "policy ping-pong" has shaped the Union Budget 2026-27, which is anchored in policy stability while laying the pathways for the long-term vision of a 'Viksit Bharat' at its core, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said.

Framed as the first Budget of a new five-year fiscal cycle and the second quarter of the 21st century, it prioritises capital expenditure, infrastructure expansion and structural reforms over populist measures, while maintaining fiscal discipline. —*PTI*

Edible oil, soybean industry seek clarity on tariff cuts

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

The edible oil and soybean processing industry has cautiously welcomed the India–US interim trade agreement announced on Saturday, but said clarity is needed on tariff cuts, quotas and quality norms.

Under the pact, the US will cut tariffs on Indian goods to 18 per cent from 50 per cent, while India will eliminate or reduce duties on US industrial goods and food and farm items, including soybean oil, DDGS, red sorghum feed, nuts, fruits, wine and spirits.

The Solvent Extractors' Association (SEA) said India imported a record 5.47 million tonnes of soybean oil in 2024-25, largely from Argentina and Brazil, while US shipments were limited to 1.5-2 lakh tonnes at a 16.5 per cent duty.

SEA Director BV Mehta said US-origin oil costs USD 30-40 more per tonne, curbing gains.

Mehta flagged uncertainty over quota-based duty-free access, cess cuts, impact on Argentine supplies, palm oil imports and Nepal flows. DDGS imports aid feed, hurt output. —*PTI*

FPIs turn net buyers, invest Rs 8.1K cr in Jan

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

- Depository data showed that the inflows followed sustained withdrawals in recent months. Foreign Portfolio Investors s pulled out Rs 35,962 crore in January, Rs 22,611 crore in December and Rs 3,765 crore in November

After three consecutive months of heavy selling, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) turned net buyers in the first week of February, investing over Rs 8,100 crore in Indian equities, supported by improving global risk sentiment and progress on a trade deal with the United States.

Depository data showed the inflows followed sustained withdrawals in recent months. FPIs pulled out Rs 35,962 crore in January, Rs 22,611 crore in December and Rs 3,765 crore in November.

Overall, FPIs recorded net outflows of Rs 1.66 lakh crore, or USD 18.9 billion, from Indian equities in 2025 so far, marking one of the weakest phases for foreign flows. Selling pressure was driven by volatile currency movements, global trade tensions, concerns over potential US tariffs and stretched equity valuations.

According to the data, FPIs invested Rs 8,129 crore this month until 6 February. Himanshu Srivastava, principal manager-research at Morningstar Investment Research India, said the buying reflected improving risk appetite and renewed confidence in India's growth outlook. "The sentiment was supported by easing global uncertainties, stability in domestic interest rate expectations, and optimism around India-US trade and policy developments," he said.

The shift contrasts sharply with January's outflows, when FPIs exited Indian markets amid a global risk-off environment and elevated US bond yields.

Vaqarjaved Khan, analyst at Angel One, said progress in India-US trade talks reduced geopolitical uncertainty and supported a market rally, alongside stabilising US yields and measures announced in the Union Budget for FY26 period. —*PTI*

MCap of 8 firms up by Rs 4.55L cr

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

The combined market valuation of eight of the top 10 valued firms jumped by a whopping Rs 4.55 lakh crore last week, with Reliance Industries emerging as the biggest winner, in line with a remarkable rally in equities.

From the top-10 pack, Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Bajaj Finance, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), and Hindustan Unilever were the gainers, while Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Infosys saw their valuations erode. The combined market valuation of the eight firms was Rs 4,55,336.36 crore.

Reliance Industries added Rs 1,41,887.97 crore, taking its market valuation to Rs 19,63,358.79 crore.

LIC's valuation zoomed Rs 64,926.1 crore to Rs 5,70,198.54 crore, Bharti Airtel's surged Rs 52,516.39 crore to Rs 11,62,288.64 crore and ICICI Bank's jumped Rs 52,476.97 crore to Rs 10,06,258.82 crore.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of Bajaj Finance climbed Rs 48,659.83 crore to Rs 6,10,830.20 crore and State Bank of India's by Rs 45,460.79 crore to Rs 9,84,353.06 crore.

HDFC Bank's valuation advanced by Rs 32,350.28 crore to Rs 14,48,249.63 crore and Hindustan Unilever's by Rs 17,058.03 crore to Rs 5,69,482.18 crore.

However, the market valuation of TCS eroded by Rs 88,172.8 crore to Rs 10,64,242.35 crore. The mcap of Infosys declined by Rs 63,462.66 crore to Rs 6,26,067.95 crore amid concerns around AI's rapid progress. —*PTI*

Inflation, global cues to steer market this week: Analysts

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Inflation data, foreign investor activity and global cues are expected to shape stock market sentiment this week, analysts said, with geopolitics and the Q3 earnings season also influencing movements.

Investors will track India's retail inflation data due on February 12 and foreign exchange reserves figures on February 13 for signals on price trends and external stability.

"This week has several key domestic and global triggers," said Ajit Mishra, senior vice-president, research, Religare Broking.

The earnings calendar remains active, with results expected from Titan and Mahindra & Mahindra, alongside Ashok Leyland, ONGC, Bajaj Electricals and Eicher Motors, likely driving stock-specific action.

Globally, markets will watch a heavy US data calendar and the Nasdaq Composite following its recent decline.

Separately, India and the US have agreed on an interim trade framework to reduce duties on select goods and boost bilateral trade. —*PTI*

Forex reserves touch record high of $723.8B

MUMBAI, 8 FEB

India's foreign exchange reserves reached another new all-time high in the week ended January 30, according to the Reserve Bank of India's latest data.

Foreign exchange reserves rose sharply by USD 14.361 billion in the week to USD 723.774 billion, driven by a jump in gold reserves while foreign currency assets dropped.

Over the past few weeks, the forex kitty has been largely in an uptrend.Its previous high was USD 709.403 billion, touched in the previous week. For the reported week (that ended January 30), India's foreign currency assets (FCA), the largest component of foreign exchange reserves, stood at USD 562.392 billion, down USD 493 million.

The RBI data showed that gold reserves currently stand at USD 137.683 billion, up USD 14.595 billion from the previous week.After the latest monetary policy review meeting in early December, the RBI had said that the country's foreign exchange reserves were sufficient to cover more than 11 months of merchandise imports.

Overall, India's external sector remains resilient, and the RBI is confident it can comfortably meet external financing requirements. In 2025, the forex kitty has increased by about 56 billion, according to data. —ANI

IPO-bound PhonePe bets big on digital payments, merchants

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

- Payments will remain its primary growth driver, supported by investments to expand its user base

IPO-bound PhonePe plans to strengthen its core digital payments business while expanding financial services and new consumer platforms, as it prepares to hit the capital markets in Apr

In its draft red herring prospectus, the Walmart-backed firm said payments will remain its primary growth driver, supported by investments to expand its user base, addressable market and platform scale. India's digital consumer payments market stood at Rs 301 lakh crore in FY25 and is projected to grow to Rs 602–681 lakh crore by FY30, it said, citing industry estimates.

The proposed IPO will be entirely an offer for sale of 5.06 crore shares by existing investors, including Walmart, Microsoft and Tiger Global, with no fresh issue component. PhonePe received Sebi approval for its maiden public offering in January, following a confidential filing in September.

To widen adoption, the company plans deeper penetration across smartphones and feature phones. It recently acquired Gupshup's GSPay technology stack to enable UPI payments on feature phones.

PhonePe also plans to scale its merchant base, while investing in platforms such as Share. Market, Indus Appstore. —*PTI*

GOLD LIKELY TO HOLD GROUND AMID US INFLATION DATA

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Gold prices are likely to trade firm next week as traders await key economic data, including US inflation numbers, for fresh cues on interest rate outlook, while silver may remain volatile amid shifting risk sentiment and speculative activity, analysts said.

Traders will look for cues from US GDP, PMI, non-farm payroll and inflation data.

Also, inflation readings from China, Germany, and India will also be keenly watched.

Speeches from US Federal Reserve officials will be closely tracked as well for indications on the timing of potential rate cuts and their impact on bullion prices, they added.

"Gold consolidation and recovery suggest that bias still remains positive. However, in case of silver, we remain cautious of volatility and further corrections," Pranav Mer, Vice President of the EBG - Commodity & Currency Research at JM Financial Services, said.

During the past week, gold futures climbed Rs 7,698, or 5.2 per cent, while silver slumped Rs 15,760 or nearly 6 per cent on the Multi Commodity Exchange.

The domestic markets were not spared from the turmoil. Though the Union Budget, announced in the first week of this month, largely met expectations with no major-specific surprises, volatility in bullion persisted amid swings in the rupee.

A softer USD/INR following progress on a potential trade deal between New Delhi and Washington, which pressurised local bullion prices.

Despite the steep selloff, Modi explained that signs of stabilisation emerged as forced liquidation eased and value buying returned across both metals. —*PTI*

FICCI-EY STUDY REVEALS

Cyber threats top risk for India Inc: Survey

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Cybersecurity breaches and attacks have emerged as the top risks for Indian companies' organisational performance, with 51 per cent of senior leaders citing it as their primary concern, according to a new survey released on Sunday.

The 'FICCI-EY Risk Survey 2026' identified changing customer demands (49 per cent) and geopolitical events (48 per cent) as the next two most critical risks facing businesses.

The report, which draws on inputs from senior decision-makers across various sectors, highlights that technology risk is now tightly linked to operational continuity.

According to the survey, 61 per cent of respondents feel that rapid technological change and digital disruption are affecting their competitive position. An equal proportion (61 per cent) identified cyber-attacks and data breaches as major financial and reputational threats.

"More than half, 57 per cent, report potential data theft and insider fraud as significant risks, and 47 per cent acknowledge difficulty in addressing increasingly sophisticated cyber threats," the report stated.

The findings are based on a web-based survey of 137 senior decision-makers, including CXOs. The technology sector had the highest representation in the study at 21 per cent, followed by professional services.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a dual risk area for India Inc.

While 60 per cent of respondents believe inadequate adoption of emerging technologies, including AI, can adversely impact operational effectiveness, 54 per cent feel AI-related risks, including ethical and governance issues, are not being effectively managed. —*PTI*

Mundra Port posts record auto exports in January

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Adani Group's Mundra Port in Gujarat has recorded a sharp increase in automobile exports and liquid cargo volumes in January 2026, posting multiple operational records that highlighted the growing role of large, integrated ports in supporting India's trade and export flows.

The port handled its highest-ever monthly automobile export volume, shipping 25,762 vehicles through its dedicated roll-on/roll-off (RoRo) terminal at Adani Mundra Container Terminal (CT2), officials said.

Automakers, including Maruti Suzuki and Toyota, increasingly routed exports through Mundra during the month, with shipments destined for markets across Africa, Europe, East Asia, Australia, and the Middle East, according to port officials.

Mundra also set a new single-vessel loading record in January, loading 5,701 vehicles onto a single ship, the highest number handled in one movement at the port.

Separately, the port's liquid terminal handled 1.120 million tonnes of liquid cargo in January, marking its highest-ever monthly throughput and exceeding the previous peak recorded in December 2025, officials said. The rise highlighted its capacity to handle multiple cargo streams simultaneously, including energy products. —*PTI*

-PTI

Basil Sunny wins maiden National Supercross title

VISAKHAPATNAM, 8 FEB

Ernakulam rider Basil Sunny clinched his maiden national crown at the finale of the MRF MoGrip FMSCI Indian National Supercross Championship here on Sunday. Racing through pain from a torn ligament and a fractured left toe, and postponing medical treatment to see out the season, Sunny delivered one of the most determined campaigns in recent Indian Supercross history. Despite not winning a moto across the six rounds, his relentless top finishes and refusal to give up proved decisive and won him the national title. "I feel relieved, and it is such a wonderful feeling to win my maiden championship title despite all the on-field and off-track drama. The premier SX1 class belonged to Pune's Rugved Barguje, who reclaimed the national crown.—*PTI*

-PTI

Gout Gout rules himself out of CWG 2026

SYDNEY, 8 FEB

Australian sprint sensation Gout Gout has opted out of the Commonwealth Games (CWG) 2026, according to reports. The 18-year-old sprinter will skip the Commonwealth Games, set to take place in Glasgow from July 23 to August 2. Instead, he will focus on the World U20 Championships, which will be held in Eugene, Oregon, USA, from 5 to 9 August. "It's (Commonwealth Games) a great event, and it's one of those big meets where everyone loves (it), but looking at development, it's definitely the better decision going for the World U20s," he said to Channel 7's Bruce McAvaney, as reported by SEN. Gout won a silver in the 200m event at the previous edition of the World U20 Championships in Lima, Peru, in 2024.—*PTI*

Esports Nations Cup 2026 adds chess to its lineup

DUBAI, 8 FEB

Esports World Cup Foundation (EWCF) on Sunday announced chess as the latest of 16 titles that national teams and players will compete in at the inaugural Esports Nations Cup 2026 (ENC), set to debut in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from 2 November through 29. The chess tournament at ENC will begin on 2 November and will conclude with the playoff final on 8 November. The opening portion of the tournament will consist of 128 players competing in a round-robin group stage, featuring 16 groups of eight players.—*PTI*

India's first kickboxing league launched

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

The Kickboxing Super League (KSL) was unveiled on the sidelines of the WAKO India National Championship here. The launch on Saturday took place in the presence of senior government representatives, national sports officials, athletes, coaches, and stakeholders from across the Indian sporting ecosystem. "KSL aims to professionalise kickboxing in India by introducing structured competition, athlete contracts, performance-linked rewards, and a clear pathway from grassroots to elite competition," said the organisers in a release.—*PTI*

Tim Seifert powers NZ to a 5-wicket win vs Afghanistan

England survives Nepal scare in last-over thriller

CHENNAI, 8 FEB

Tim Seifert's typically aggressive fifty was the moving force behind New Zealand's five-wicket victory over Afghanistan in a Group D match of the T20 World Cup here on Sunday.

Seifert (65, 42b, 7x4, 3x6) showed why he has been nicknamed 'Bam Bam' in Kiwis' circles, helping his side go past the target of 183 with considerable ease. Seifert had an equally single-minded partner in Glenn Phillips (42, 25b) as the third wicket pair added 74 runs in 47 balls to rescue New Zealand from a wobbly 14 for two. The turbulence was the result of the little passage of magic by spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman, who dismissed Finn Allen and Rachin Ravindra off successive balls in the second over. But the Antipodeans clawed back through Seifert, who fetched his fifty off 39 balls with a six off off-spinner Mohammad Nabi.

As the noon moved on, the assistance for spinners from the pitch was reduced to a good extent. Phillips focused more on Rashid Khan, slamming him for a four and six as New Zealand got a real move-on. However, Nabi had the last laugh, dismissing Seifert, and Rashid too got his revenge through the wicket of Phillips. Earlier, seasoned Gulbadin Naib made a free-flowing fifty, but Afghanistan had to settle for a slightly below-par total of 182 for six.

Brief Score: Afghanistan: 182 for six in 20 overs (Gulbadin Naib 63; Lockie Fergusen 2/32). New Zealand: 183 for 5 in 17.5 overs (Tim Seifert 65; Mujeeb Ur Rahman 2/31).

Tim Seifert -PTI

Two-time champions **England** survived a massive scare against a doughty Nepal in their Group C clash of the T20 World Cup, clinching a narrow four-run win in a tense finish to their tournament opener here on Sunday.

Nepal came within touching distance of creating history as they nearly upset one of the teams to beat in the competition, scoring 180/6 in reply to England's 184/7.

Lokesh Bam (39 not out off 20 balls) kept Nepal in the hunt for an upset victory, but could not finish the game in the final over after a heroic effort.

Needing 10 runs off the last over, Nepal couldn't find a boundary as their inspired show with the bat ended in a narrow loss. Sam Curran nailed his yorkers relentlessly as all that Nepal could manage were five runs.

Brief Scores: England: 184 for 7 in 20 overs (Jacob Bethell 55, Harry Brook 53). Nepal: 180 for 6 in 20 overs (Lokesh Bam 39 not out, Dipendra Singh Airee 44; Liam Dawson 2/21).

ICC deputy chair arrives in Lahore for talks with PCB

Imran Khwaja, deputy chair of the International Cricket Council, arrived in Lahore on Sunday evening for crucial talks with PCB officials as efforts to resolve the standoff over Pakistan's proposed boycott of the high-stakes T20 World Cup match against India gather pace.

Khwaja, who represents Singapore in the ICC, is an influential figure in the world governing body and has voting rights on the board as an associate member director.

A source close to the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) confirmed Khwaja has been nominated by the ICC board as a mediator on the controversial subject. —*PTI*

ICC T20 WC MATCHES TOMMORROW

Italy ready to impress in T20 World Cup debut against Scotland

Football powerhouse Italy will get a chance to make a mark in cricket's biggest stage when they face Scotland in a historic ICC T20 World Cup debut game here on Monday. Winner of four FIFA World Cups, the Azzurri will now give way to Gli Azzurri, who find themselves scripting an unlikely cricketing chapter after making the expanded 20-team tournament through the European regional qualifiers last July. Italy and the Channel Islands of Jersey, who upset Scotland, finished on five points, but the Italians sealed the second place behind the Dutchmen ona superior net run rate to book their maiden appearance at the global showpiece.***Match starts @11 AM Monday***

South Africa aims to reverse recent form against Canada

South Africa would need to raise their recent form to challenge for the title as they open their T20 World Cup campaign against Canada, a team short on match practice but looking to make a strong impression, here on Monday.South Africa has only managed to win 12 out of the 32 games they have played since losing the 2024 T20 World Cup final to India in June 2024.However, they now do have the emboldened belief of winning a world title, having ended the trophy drought with the World Test Championships triumph last year. Ryan Rickleton and Tristian Stubbs were not part of the original squad but have rightfully included following injuries to Donavan Ferreria and Tony de Zorzi.***Match starts @3 pm Monday***

South Africa vs Canada Match starts @7 pm Monday

Rahul's unbeaten 50 hands K'taka edge against Mumbai

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

India batter KL Rahul hit a fine half-century to hand Karnataka a slight edge over Mumbai at stumps on the third day of their Ranji Trophy quarterfinal here on Sunday.

Chasing 325, Rahul was unbeaten on 60 off 94 balls with the help of seven boundaries and together with captain Devdutt Padikkal (39), shared 84 runs for the second wicket to help Karnataka end the day at 113 for two in 29 overs, needing another 212 runs to register an outright win.

Karun Nair (9 not out) was at the crease alongside Rahul at the close of play.Off-spinner Tanush Kotian (1/13) and skipper Shardul Thakur (1/24) picked up a wicket each for Mumbai.

KL Rahul -PTI

Earlier, resuming their second innings at 189 for 2, wicket-keeper Akash Anand (70) added 17 runs to his overnight score while Musheer Khan made 49.

Towards the back end of the innings, Kotian scored an unbeaten 48, while Tushar Deshpande made 47 to help Mumbai post 377 all out in 98.3 overs, thereby setting a target of 325 runs for Karnataka.Left-arm spinner Shikhar Shetty was the pick of the bowlers for Karnataka in Mumbai's second essay with figures of 3/45.

Brief Scores.
Mumbai:
120 & 377 all out in 98.3 overs (Akash Ananad 70, Musheer Khan 49, Tansh Kotian 48, Tshar Deshpande 47; Shikhar Shetty 3/45)
Karnataka: 173 & 113 for 2 in 29 overs (KL Rahul 60, Devdutt Padikkal 39; Tanush Kotian 1/13). —*PTI*

ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIP 2026

Arjun, Elavenil win 10m air rifle mixed team gold

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

India's Elavenil and Arjun Babuta bagged the host nation's ninth senior gold -*ASIAN SHOOTING CONFEDERATION/X*

Arjun Babuta and Elavenil Valarivan added one more gold to India's tally at the ongoing Asian Championship in New Delhi by winning the 10m air rifle mixed team event with a new World Record on Sunday. Arjun and Elavenil emerged victorious in the final with a score of 505.

Republic of Korea's Kim Woorim and Kwon Eunji finished second with 501, while Japan's Naoya Okada and Misaki Nobata took the final place on the podium with 437.9

The Indian pair had also topped the qualification round with 632.8. Compatriots Rudrankksh Patil and Meghana Sajjanar finished third with a score of 629 but could not progress further as only one pair per nation was allowed in the four-team final. In the final, Arjun and Elavenil led from the get-go. In the first series, the Indians scored 105.1 to take a slender lead of 0.2 over Nobata and Okada. After the second series, that advantage increased to 2.4 with the home team on 211. —*PTI*

India U-19 WC-winning team receives grand welcome

MUMBAI, 8 FEB

The victorious U-19 World Cup-winning Indian team returned to a grand welcome with family members of the players and a large number of fans turning up to receive the young heroes here on Sunday.

Arjun Babuta and Elavenil Valarivan added one more gold to India's tally at the ongoing Asian Championship in New Delhi by winning the 10m air rifle mixed team event with a new World Record on Sunday. Arjun and Elavenil emerged victorious in the final with a score of 505.

Sooryavanshi headlines U-19 WC Team of the Tournament

Batting sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi was among the three Indians named in the Team of the Tournament for the ICC Under-19 World Cup on Sunday.

The 14-year-old Soorya vanshi, who scored a majestic 175 from 80 balls in the final against England and was subsequently crowned Player of the Tournament, is joined by compatriots Kanishk Chouhan and Henil Patel in the 12-member team. —*PTI*

Santosh Trophy: Services beat Kerala in extra-time

ASSAM, 8 FEB

Abhishek Pawar scored in extratime as Services beat Kerala 1-0 in the Santosh Trophy 2025-26 final at the Dhakuakhana Football Stadium in Assam on Sunday.

Pawar, who had scored the winner against Kerala in their previous clash, netted his seventh goal of the tournament in second-half extra-time, steering the ball into the net with a side volley.

It was the eighth Santosh Trophy title for Services, while seven-time champion Kerala lost its second final in a row, having lost to West Bengal on penalties last season.Kerala, having entered the summit clash after a 4-0 win over Punjab in the semifinal, started the match very aggressively, and almost scored in the 27th minute when Arjun V's left-footed shot from outside the box, which left the goalpost shaking.But Services, which was the second-best defensive side in the group stage and progressed through the knockout stages without conceding a single goal, maintained its reputation. —*PTI*

Davis Cup: Dhakshineswar and Bhambri win marathon doubles

BENGALURU, 8 FEB

Yuki Bhambri and Dhakshineswar Suresh prevailed in a marathon doubles rubber, outlasting David Pel and Sander Arends 7-6 (0) 3-6, 7-6 (1) as India edged ahead 2-1 in their Davis Cup Qualifiers Round 1 tie against the Netherlands here on Sunday.

In a contest that swung repeatedly for exactly three hours, India captain Rohit Rajpal's call to bring in Dhakshineswar in place of N Sriram Balaji for the high-stakes doubles proved decisive, as the home pair held their nerve when it mattered the most. With both teams desperate to seize control of the tie after it stood level at 1-1 overnight, the opening set turned into a stern test of patience and resolve.

Bhambri's serve was under sustained pressure, particularly in the seventh game when his first serve deserted him. A double fault at 30-all handed the Dutch a break point, but Bhambri responded with deep, probing returns to snuff out the threat. Dhakshineswar then missed a regulation backhand volley on game point, and Arends' awkward yet effective overhead smash aimed at his legs earned the visitors another break chance. —*PTI*

TEJASWIN SHANKAR WINS GOLD

NEW DELHI, 8 FEB

Tejaswin Shankar won the men's heptathlon event to clinch India's lone gold as the country ended the Asian Indoor Athletics Championships campaign with five medals in Tianjin on Sunday.

India finished overall sixth in the medal tally. China topped the charts with 34 medals—10 gold, 11 silver, and 13 bronze.

On his way to winning the gold medal in the heptathlon, Shankar collected 5993 points to better his own national indoor mark of 5650 points, set in 2021 in the USA. —*PTI*

BOXAM ELITE 2026

Lovlina, Arundhati lead as India claim 9 gold

LA NUCIA, 8 FEB

Olympic medallist Lovlina Borgohain and former Youth World champion Arundhati Choudhary led from the front as India wrapped up a highly successful BOXAM Elite International 2026 tournament with a dominant show, clinching nine gold medals in the event here.

In a standout achievement, India was represented in seven elite women's finals on Saturday, including an all-Indian title clash in the 54kg division and emerged with gold in each of them.

The BOXAM Elite 2026 featured over 200 boxers from 20 nations, providing a high-quality international test early in the season. India finished as the competition's most successful team with nine gold, three silver and seven bronze medals.

Olympic medallist Lovlina Borgohain -*PTI*

"BOXAM Elite offered exactly the kind of exposure we were seeking at this stage of the season, including strong international opposition, depth across weight categories, and high-pressure bouts. The performances in Spain, particularly the conversion rate in finals, reflect the progress of our programme," Boxing Federation of India (BFI) president Ajay Singh said. "With a demanding year ahead, this tournament has been a valuable step in preparing our boxers for the challenges to come. Congratulations to the entire contingent on an outstanding campaign."

Indian women set the benchmark on the final day. Manju Rani (48kg) and Nitu (51kg) opened proceedings with emphatic unanimous wins over Spain's Marta Lopez. —*PTI*